KRÁTKÝ FILM

The Art of Czechoslovak Animation

KRÁTKÝ FILM

The Art of Czechoslovak Animation

KRÁTKÝ FILM

The Art of Czechoslovak Animation

with essays by

JAN POŠ

and

HOWARD BECKERMAN

Exhibition organized by

JEFFREY WECHSLER

THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY
RUTGERS

Cover: The Hand, 1965. Direction, story, and screenplay: Jiří Trnka.

Exhibition schedule

Jane Voorhees Zimmerli Art Museum
New Brunswick, New Jersey
March 10–July 2, 1991

University of Arizona Museum of Art
Tucson, Arizona
August 20–September 30, 1991

Joslyn Art Museum
Omaha, Nebraska
November 23, 1991–January 19, 1992

Library of Congress catalogue card no. 90-63698
Copyright © 1991. Published by The Jane Voorhees Zimmerli Art Museum
Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey.

This exhibition and catalogue were generously supported by
The National Endowment for the Arts, a Federal agency in Washington, D.C.,
and The New Jersey State Council on the Arts/Department of State.

The Zimmerli Art Museum is funded in part by The Institute of Museum Services,
a Federal agency that offers general operating support to the nation's museums,
and Johnson & Johnson Family of Companies.

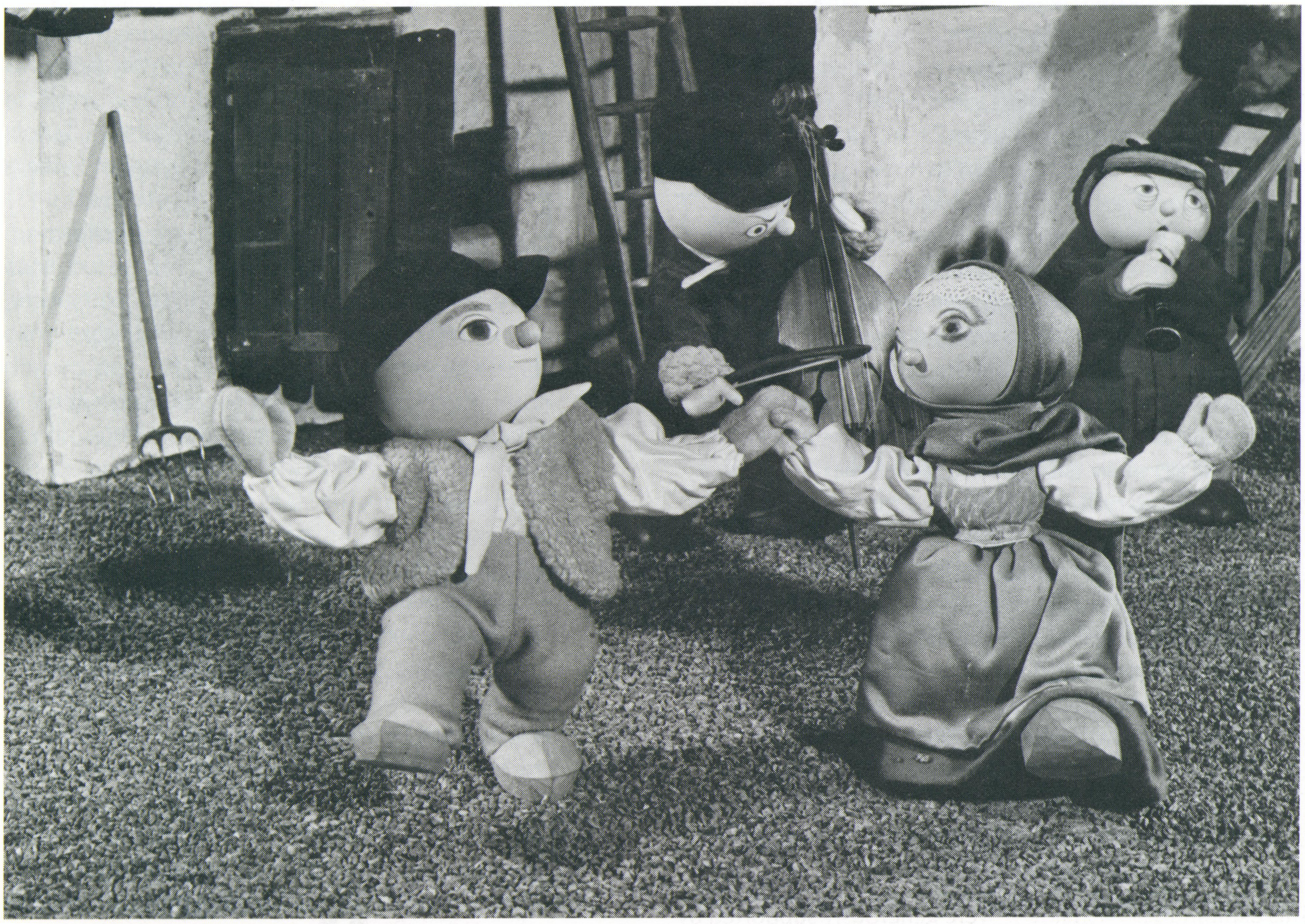
NEW JERSEY
STATE
COUNCIL
ON THE
ARTS

Table of Contents

Director's Statement vii
Introduction and Acknowledgements ix
Color Plates xii

HOWARD BECKERMAN
An American Animator Discovers the Czechs 1

JAN POŠ
Animated Film in Czechoslovakia: Past and Present 7



Puppets for *The Czech Year*, 1947. Director: Jiří Trnka.

KRÁTKÝ FILM

Director's Statement

It is a great privilege for the Zimmerli Art Museum to be the organizing institution of the first traveling museum exhibition to bring to the American public the artistry, craftsmanship, and imagination of the animated films produced in Czechoslovakia. Although American television and movie audiences have appreciated for some time so-called "cartoons" and artistic animations, such as those by Disney, the products of the international animation community remain little known. By presenting the wonderful works created at Krátký Film, the short film studio in Prague, Czechoslovakia, we hope to widen this country's perception of this often under-appreciated art form, and do so with a less familiar but professionally acclaimed group of films, reflective of a distinct national culture.

Not only should the Czechoslovak animations themselves come as pleasant surprises to Americans, but some of the techniques used in their production may be revelations as well. Most Americans, especially children, know animation as a two-dimensional art of drawn images; special effects are often the province of "high-tech" processes such as computer graphics. In contrast, many Czechoslovak animations are "puppet films" based on traditional methods of manipulating exquisitely crafted figurines and miniature sets. The presence of many of these elaborate puppets and props, along with materials representing other animation techniques, will reveal and explain older animation techniques that are, paradoxically, quite new to Americans.

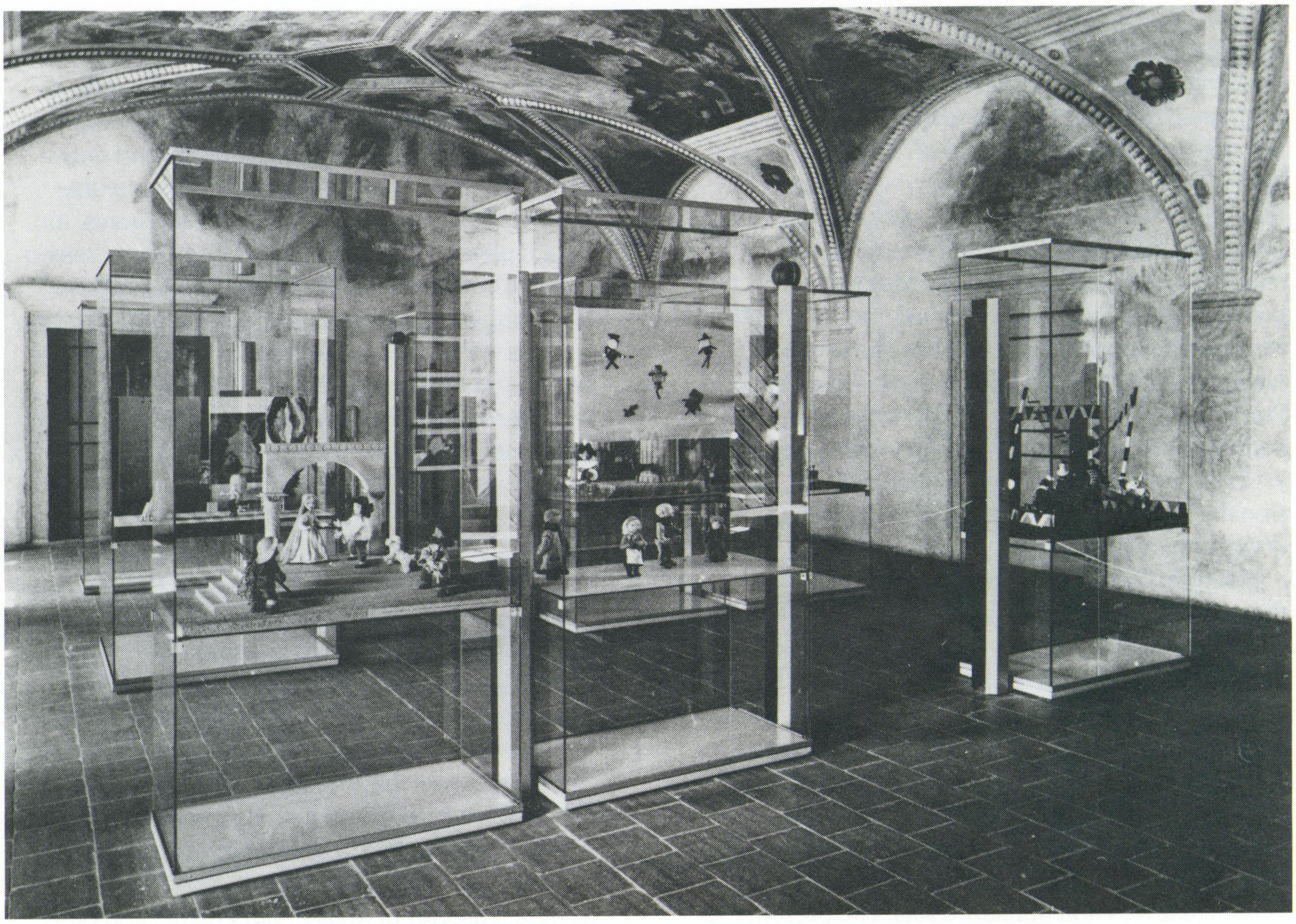
With this exhibition the Zimmerli Art Museum continues to address the artistic education of an important segment of the population: children. The museum's Collection of Original Illustrations for Children's Literature is based upon the assumption that a child's first in-depth aesthetic encounter is usually through an illustrated book. Because today's children are tomorrow's college students, a university-based museum with active community outreach programs should strive to introduce children to interesting visual experiences of high aesthetic quality. Extending this concept into the sorts of moving images that affect our society's children—television and cartoons—these animations, with their sensitive and amusing stories, realized with beautifully made objects and drawings, provide an enlightening alternative for the appreciation of youngsters—and their parents, too.

I am pleased that "Krátký Film: The Art of Czechoslovak Animation" will be presented at two other museums in the United States, giving these fine animations wide geographic exposure. For a Midwest venue, I thank Graham W.J. Beal, Director of the Joslyn Art Museum, Omaha, Nebraska. For a Southwest display at the University of Arizona Museum of Art, Tucson, I thank Peter Bermingham, Director, and Lee Karpiscak, Curator of Collections.

The organization of this exhibition straddled the momentous events of late 1989 when Czechoslovakia, with its "Velvet Revolution," took a leading place among those nations of central and eastern Europe who gained new freedom as the barbed-wire and concrete barriers of the Iron Curtain were torn down. It is with great appreciation and respect that we thank all the animators, directors, and other personnel at Krátký Film who maintained the progress of this exhibition during what were certainly difficult, if exciting, times. To Jan Knoslíček, General Director of Krátký Film Prague, and other administrators of the film studios, I extend my appreciation for the continued support of this project. I am also gratified that the exhibition is traveling under the official auspices of the Embassy of the Czech and Slovak Federal Republic, and I thank the Cultural Counselor, Jiří Šetlík, for his assistance in this regard.

Finally, the impetus for this project derives from the creative and always challenging mind of Jeffrey Wechsler, the Zimmerli Art Museum's Assistant Director for Curatorial Affairs. As organizer of the exhibition, he has once more allowed the Zimmerli to approach and investigate worthwhile but uncharted territories.

Phillip Dennis Cate
Director



Installation view of puppets and sets at Kratochvíle Castle, a restored late-16th-century building located in Česke Budějovice, South Bohemia, that serves as the national museum for Czechoslovak animated film.

Introduction and Acknowledgements

"Krátký Film: The Art of Czechoslovak Animation" is presented as an introduction to the general American public of the animated films produced under the auspices of Krátký Film, a division of the government-sponsored complex of film production studios centered in Prague. Krátký Film, translated literally, means "short film"—as opposed to feature-length film. The animated films may be further defined in origin as being produced at the "Bratři v triku" (Trick Brothers) Studio and Jiří Trnka Studio, named in honor of the individual whose historical and creative status in Czechoslovakia is analogous to that of Walt Disney in the United States. Jiří Trnka, however, specialized in a technique called "puppet film," a term that is rather misleading and prosaic for Americans: misleading, because the puppets are virtually never hollow figures manipulated from within by a human hand, like Kukla and Ollie, or Kermit the Frog; prosaic, because the "puppets" used in Czechoslovak animation are in fact extremely sophisticated as artistic and emotive personages, are meticulously designed and crafted, and take part in comedies and dramas of great imaginative power and subtlety.

In the United States, the popular notion of an animated film is generally associated with "cartoons," in which the imagery is created by a series of drawings. Although this form of animation attained great creative heights with Walt Disney and a few others, much American drawn animation stays on the level of "cartoons," and, as seen in many Saturday morning children's television programs, that level is rather depressingly low in terms of writing and animation technique. Czechoslovak animation maintains consistently high standards, and the seriousness of purpose brought to the medium is reflected not only in the great attention to meaningful storylines and artistic detail lavished on animations for children, but also in the great number of animations produced specifically for adult audiences. At Krátký Film, animation is co-equal with live action as a form of professional filmmaking, and of expressive cinema. It is considered a medium worthy of adaptations of literary masterworks from Shakespeare to Poe, from Boccaccio to Lewis Carroll, and capable of communicating human tragedy, social commentary, slapstick and satire, beloved regional folk tales, bizarre fantasy, and profound psychological drama—in other words, the full gamut of life and legend.

Among specialists in film history and criticism, and professionals in animation production, Czechoslovak animation is highly respected; Krátký Film has received continuing acclaim and many awards at international film festivals and competitions. But on the American commercial movie circuit, short films have few opportunities for general screenings; such films are available infrequently through special series at art cinemas, universities, or museums with active film programs. So this exhibition truly marks an introduction of Czechoslovak animation as process and product to a wider American audience.

It is important, though, to stress that this exhibition is only an *introduction*. There are about 35 films shown, and about the same number (though not always the same films) are represented through preliminary materials used to create the animations, such as drawings, storyboards, cels, models, props, sets, and puppets. The films were selected from the hundreds of animations created from the 1940s to the 1980s in Prague, from early works by Trnka's hand to those produced by animators of recent fame. The chronological range of the films tends more toward the contemporary, to emphasize that the venerable traditions of Czechoslovak animation continue undiminished today, and to acquaint exhibition visitors more directly with recent Krátký Film productions. For reasons of space and efficiency, the work of several accomplished animators is regrettably not present. In this serious but summary exhibition, a complete filmography and history cannot be written, but it is hoped that the present project may inspire interest in a subject that well deserves further exploration. The exhibition does, however, contain examples of objects and materials from all four major techniques of animation production employed at Krátký Film: drawings, cutouts, reliefs, and puppets.

It is the puppet animations that will probably prove to be the most exciting revelation to most

visitors, since Americans, when they hear "animation," think of cartoons and two-dimensional images. Czechoslovakia is fortunate to have nurtured the puppet film tradition begun by Trnka, and to have saved whenever possible the extraordinarily elaborate figures, objects, and stage settings used to create realistic or stylized three-dimensional action. The tableaux from puppet films will likely be the "stars" of the show to audiences unfamiliar with this painstaking technique and its changing repertory company of miniature characters populating miniature rooms, houses, towns, and landscapes. These figures and sets are exquisitely designed and handcrafted; during filming, their positions and movements are directed with as much attention to narrative continuity and emotional expression as live actors would be. Each scene is scrupulously detailed and enhanced by precise lighting effects. So important are these puppets, props, and other animation materials (and of course the films themselves) to Czechoslovak culture, that the government has established a national museum of animation, in a preserved Renaissance castle called Kratochvíle, to maintain and display them. It is a great honor and pleasure to have these delightful, magical objects appear in this exhibition, the first time they have traveled to the United States.

* * *

An exhibition such as this, essentially derived from a distant country, necessarily requires international cooperative efforts of many individuals and organizations. But rarely does one find an exhibition during whose organization the very nature and composition of the participating national government changes utterly! As Czechoslovakia participated in the extraordinary movement of democratization of central and eastern Europe in 1989 and 1990, the exhibition development continued—this despite the widespread replacement of administrative personnel, for Krátký Film was (and at this writing still is) under the aegis of the national government. Many administrators, animators, technicians, and other individuals at Krátký Film were unstinting with the time and effort they contributed toward the realization of this project. At the studios at Barrandov in Prague, I received the assistance of so many people as to make recognition here possible only as a group, although some of them deserve special recognition: Jan Stibral, Managing Director of Animated Film, was always gracious and efficient in addressing practical concerns of the exhibition, and Zdenka Deitchova, Production Manager of Animated Film, met all manner of miscellaneous organizational challenges with good humor and a truly staggering level of energy. (Her husband, Gene Deitch, a director of animations at Krátký Film, also provided considerable assistance to the project.) Preparation of puppets, drawings, and other materials maintained at Kratochvíle, as well as input into the overall scope and structure of the show, were the province of Leon Weigert, Head of the Publicity Department.

During several sojourns in Czechoslovakia, I was delighted to find so many people, whether directly related to animation production, the wider artistic circles of Prague, or simply interested citizens, who were genuinely pleased to hear about this exhibition, and displayed the best sort of national pride in the high value they placed on the cultural achievements of their country. Their kindness and solicitous nature toward visitors—whether through personal hospitality, interpretation and information gathering, or any other useful manner of aid—was a constant pleasure. Only a few can be named here for their particularly significant or extended assistance: Jan and Kveta Patočka, Stanislav and Vera Martinec, Jana Martinecova, Jindra Víkova and Pavel Banka, Petr Poš and Ivana Dolezalova.

This project is honored to have as the author of the major catalogue essay an important participant in the history of Czechoslovak cinema, Jan Poš. By 1948, Jan Poš was head of the feature film studio in Prague, and in 1962 he became head of the animated film at Krátký Film. He was a prolific writer as well, creating scripts for films, documentaries, television, and radio. Unfortunately, after taking an active part in the liberal policies of Dubček's "Prague spring" in the late 1960s, Poš was among

those purged from significant cultural positions after the Soviet tanks rolled into Czechoslovakia to maintain political control. Nevertheless, since 1973, he has published many articles on animated film (until the late 1970s under a pseudonym). As the government of Czechoslovakia has recently undergone a new liberation, it is a timely privilege to have the knowledgeable commentary of Jan Poš as part of this project.

Translation of the Jan Poš essay was the accomplishment of Hana Mironoff; I thank her for the interest and professionalism she brought to this task, which required more than a little research and much attention to detail. Continuing in the literary sphere, I also thank Robert Wechsler, head of Catbird Press and a specialist in Czechoslovak literature, for advice on various aspects of the project.

The introductory essay for this catalogue, which gives an American view of the animated films made in Czechoslovakia, was written by Howard Beckerman. A veteran of the animation field who began his career in 1949, Mr. Beckerman has worked for Terrytoon Studios (on Mighty Mouse, and on Heckle and Jeckle) and at Paramount Studios (on Popeye, and Casper the Friendly Ghost). A teacher of animation and columnist on the subject, he now runs his own animation studio in New York City. As a practitioner of animated film, he provides special insights into the particular qualities of Czechoslovak animation, both technical and emotional.

Another practicing animator, John Gati, has been very helpful with information, advice, and contacts within the professional film community during the organization of this exhibition.

The animated films from Czechoslovakia are held in high esteem by the knowledgeable international film community, and one concrete indication of this fact is the continuing relationship of Krátký Film with Weston Woods, probably the premier American producer of animated films from children's books. Weston Woods regularly sends important examples of the best children's literature to Prague for translation into the medium of film. It is most gratifying that Weston Woods has permitted a selection of animation materials and films produced at Krátký Film to be a part of this exhibition, thus adding to the fine Czechoslovak tales and adaptations some stories and authors well-known to Americans, including Maurice Sendak's classics, *Where The Wild Things Are* and *In The Night Kitchen*. Morton Schindel, president of Weston Woods, has been unfailingly generous in his cooperation and his provision of loans and technical assistance to the exhibition; Bonnie Behar and Teri Faustman, also at Weston Woods, have undertaken important administrative services for the project as well.

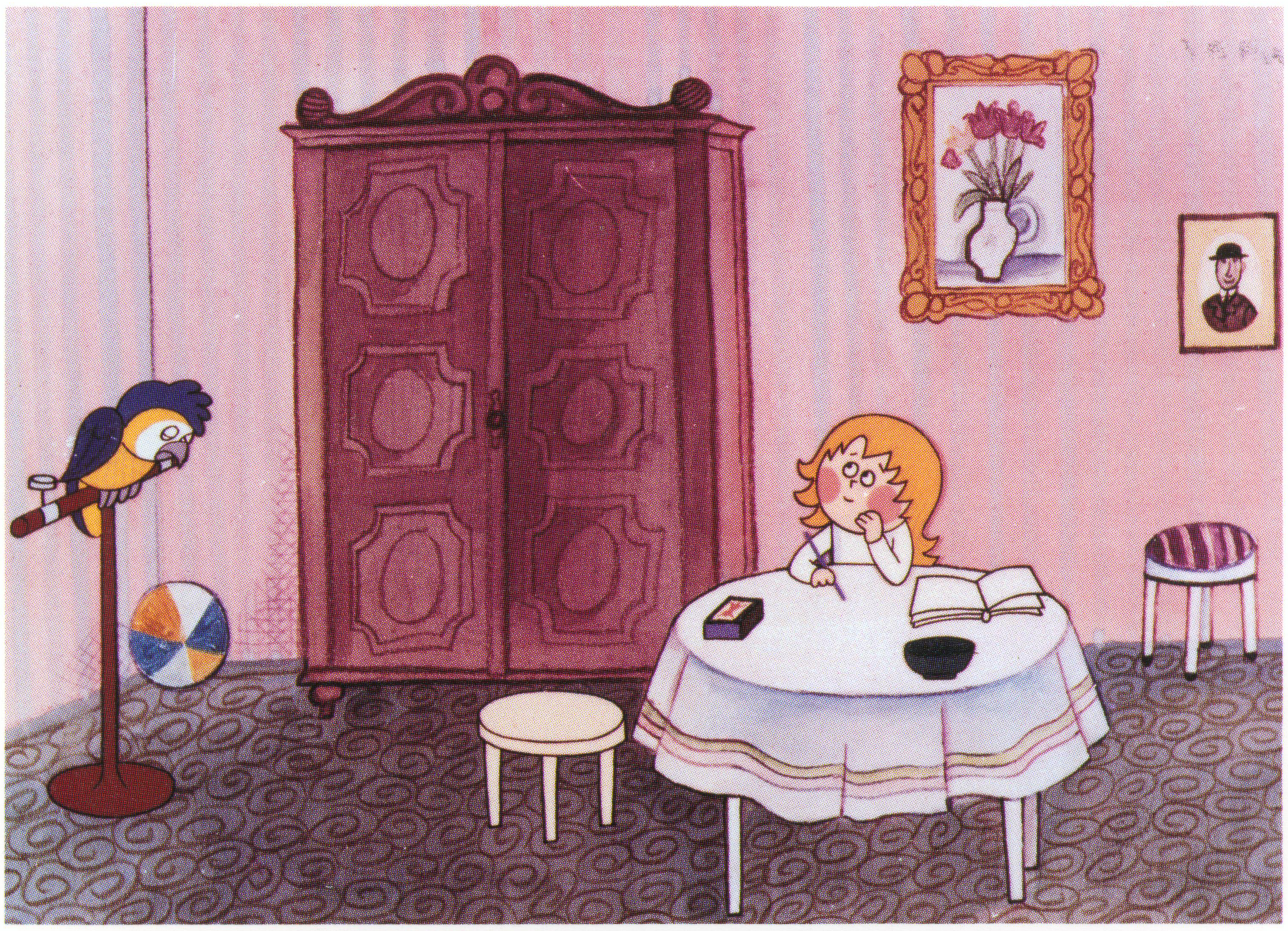
At the Zimmerli Art Museum, my work on this project was made more efficient by the able efforts of two curatorial assistants, Jenni Schlossman and Caroline Goeser, both advanced graduate students in the Department of Art History at Rutgers University. I also wish to thank other staff members at the museum for their important input on this project: Anne Schneider, Elaine Beca, Barbara Trelstad, Edward Schwab, and Roberto Delgado.

A "last but not least" appreciation is now in order. Marion Munk, a ceramist and Associate Professor of Visual Arts at Middlesex County Community College, has been an invaluable colleague and expediter of virtually all aspects of this project since its inception. Indeed, it was her interest in Czechoslovak ceramics and other arts, enhanced by professional visits to that country, that initiated this project. To her inquiry about ceramic and poster shows, I countered with my interest in animation; true to her sincere and evident admiration for the Czechoslovak people and their culture, she plunged fully into the project in as enthusiastic and altruistic a fashion as I have ever witnessed. Beyond many practicalities, such as her contacts with artists and institutions in Prague, she offered her enormous reserve of good-natured optimism and friendship—an ebullient, generous personality that has created an obvious store of good will among all those she has met there. If the job of American cultural attaché to Czechoslovakia opens up, Marion Munk gets my nomination.

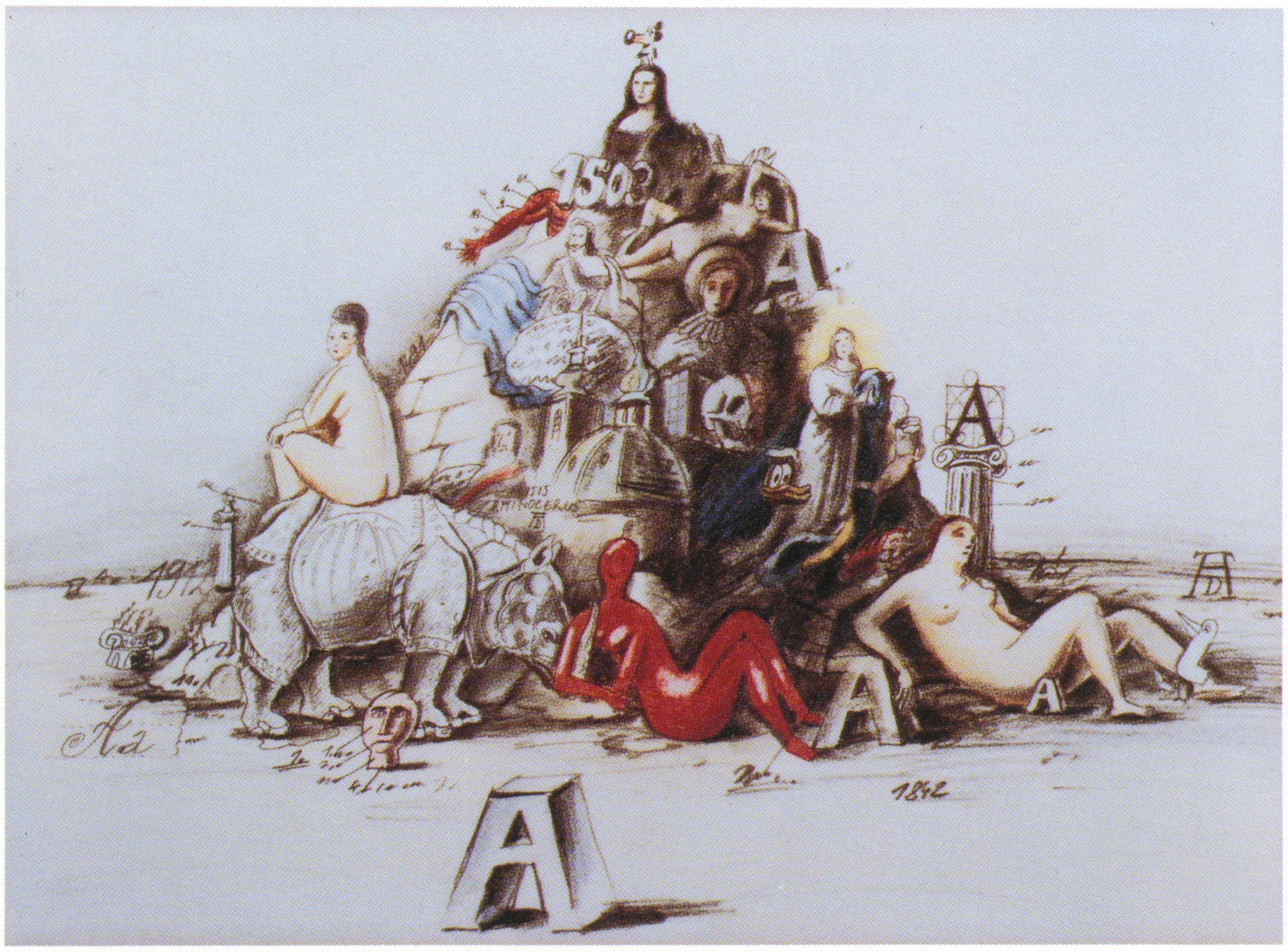
Jeffrey Wechsler
Assistant Director for Curatorial Affairs

The Archangel Gabriel and Miss Goose, 1964. Director: Jiří Trnka. Screenplay: Jiří Trnka, after a story from the *Decameron* by Giovanni Boccaccio.

Three Studies for the Animator, 1977. Director, story, screenplay: Jaroslav Boček. Design: Dagmar Berková.

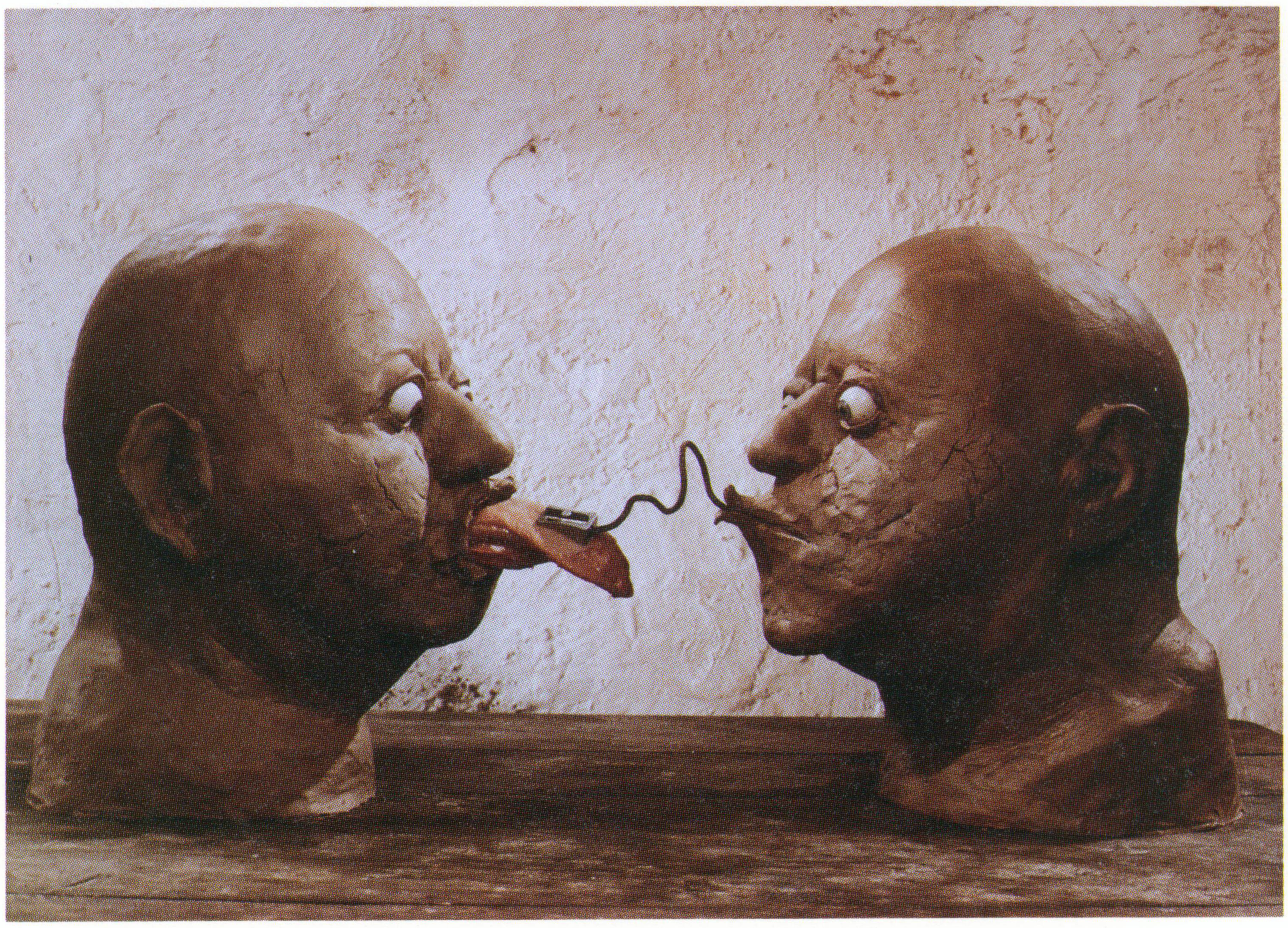


Dorothy and a Flame, 1976. Director, story, screenplay: Božena Možíšová.
Design: Jiří Kalousek.

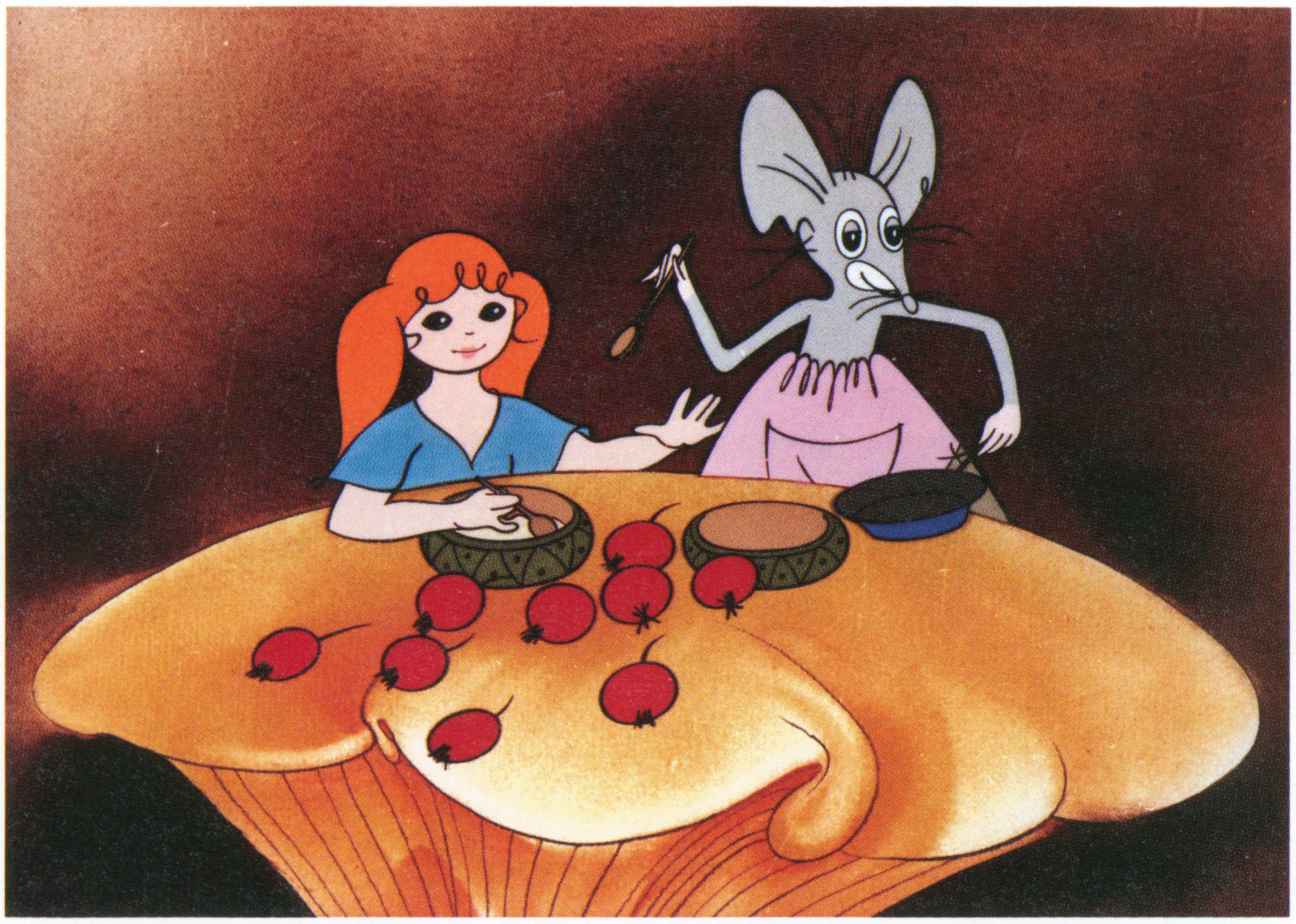


Curriculum Vitae, 1986. Director, story, screenplay, design: Pavel Koutský.

Krysař (The Pied Piper), 1985. Director, design: Jiří Barta. Story, screenplay: Kamil Pixa.

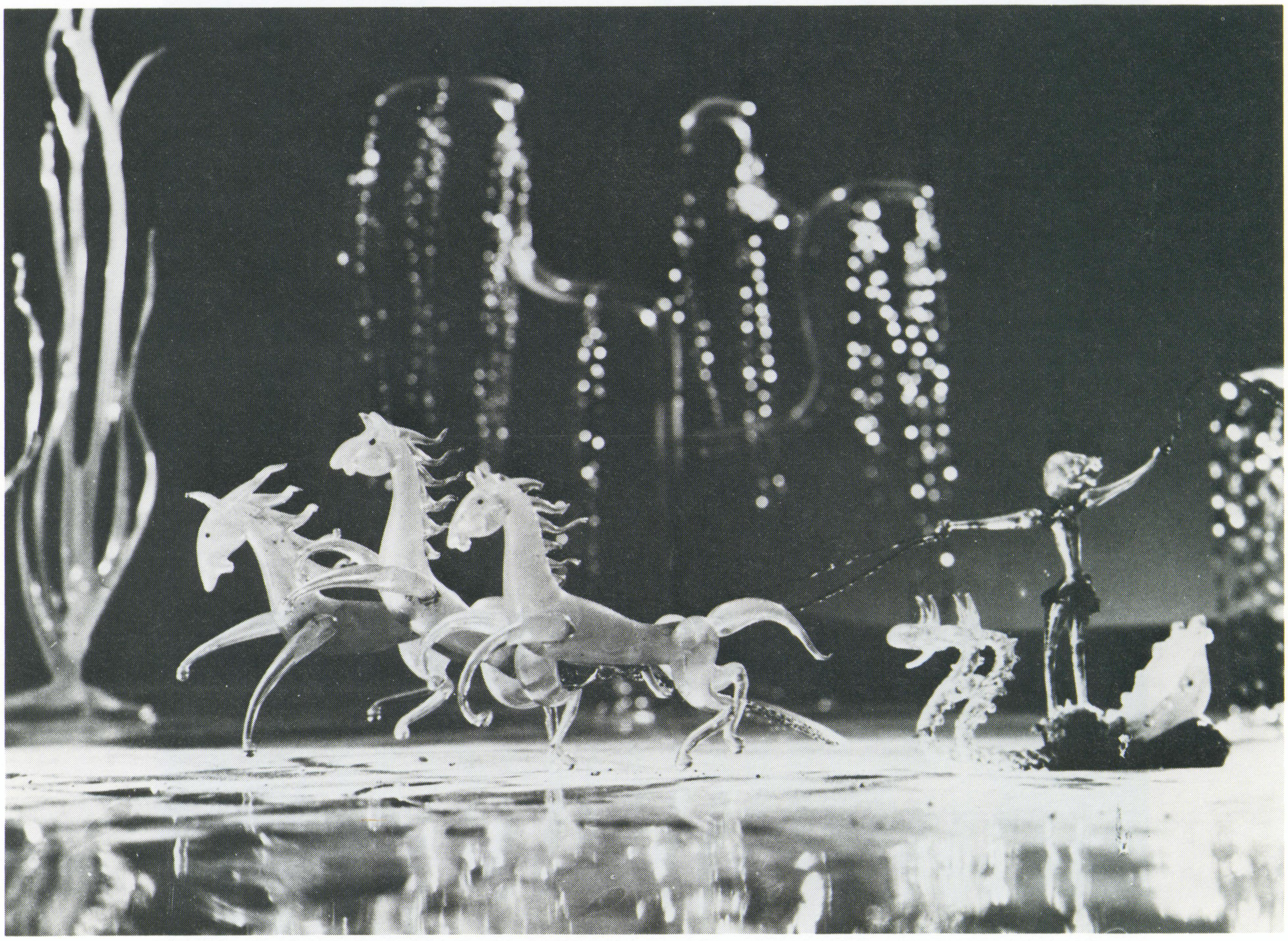


Dimensions of Dialogue, 1982. Director, story, screenplay, design: Jan Švankmajer.



Thumbelina, 1990. Director, story, screenplay: Libuše Čiha̋ová. Design: Jitka Walterová.

Pat and Mat: The Key, 1990. Director: Lubomír Beneš. Story, screenplay: Lubomír Beneš and Vladimír Jiránek. Design: Vladimír Jiránek.



Glass figures and set from Karel Zeman's *Inspiration,* 1948.

An American Animator Discovers the Czechs

by Howard Beckerman

Storytelling and character development are earmarks of American animation. It follows that it is natural to look for these elements in productions from other countries. Over the years this approach was seen in the work of Czech artists in sporadic releases of shorts and features in the United States. Although the tempo of Czech animation is slower and more deliberate than the frenetic American brand of cartoon, there is the same concentration on warmth and humor in storytelling that pervades the familiar Disney productions.

Most Americans would be unfamiliar with the names and the films of the Czech artists, yet it was Czech animation that introduced my generation to foreign animation. The power of these films is still potent, as can be seen from a recent experience. Once, during the course of a conversation, a young artist friend mentioned that she had seen a retrospective of the work of Czech filmmaker, Karel Zeman. She was so impressed with an early short subject of his, *Inspiration* (1948), in which he used characters fashioned from glass, that it inspired her to experiment with glass in her own design work.

But, it must be added, those of us who were intrigued with animation from overseas were still confident that animation was an American artform. Today it takes a little getting used to the realization that animation production is a worldwide industry. Many countries are actively producing cartoons for television and theaters, and the rolling credits reveal the diversity of international origins in the names of the artists. Unfortunately, most public exposure is given to productions that are contracted programs devoted to characters of wide popular appeal—characters that will spin off into toys, T-shirts, and bubblegum wrappers—rather than the ones made by animators who have a feel for their national origin and the stories that relate to their native culture.

Countries approach their individual folk themes according to their national gifts. Nico Crama, a filmmaker with The Holland Animation Foundation, points out that while certain nations are known for their great literary works and others for their musical geniuses, Holland, though it has contributed in all of these arts, is known for the treasured canvases of Rembrandt, Hals, Vermeer, Steen, and Hobbema. It is only natural, Crama feels, that the Netherlands should be a base for films made from drawings. Still, there is an international quality about animation and Crama takes note that the involvement of the Dutch with animation surprisingly got its impetus from an émigré Hungarian, George Pal.

In the 1930s, Pal was seeking a way to bring his unique style of puppet animation to the screen. He found it in the sponsorship of large Dutch corporations who saw in Pal's animations a pleasant way to advertise their products. Pal moved on to the United States and, although he successfully transferred his ideas to American film production, animated puppets never became more than a side act in the vast amount of cartoons to come out of Hollywood. Pal's puppets had universal appeal, but they were derived from a European tradition that was not as important to the American experience. In the United States, the animated film was seen in the context of vaudeville routines and newspaper comic strips. Comics and jazz, which grew and flourished on American soil, were combined and gave early American cartoons their distinctive style.

If the war had not been brewing in Europe when Pal was looking for a place to expand his ideas on puppet animation, he might have left Hungary for Czechoslovakia. Here, following that country's well-honed skills at making dolls and wooden toys, was an interest in adapting these skills to animation. While Pal was transporting his puppet creations from country to country, the Czechs were establishing their own national style. Through the years various Czech artists would find their way to the medium and add their individual touches to what was to become a proud animation history. Karel Dodal, Joseph Kluge, Pavel Procházka, Garik Seko, Vladimir Lehky, Jan Karpas, Zdeněk Miler, Hermína

Týrlová, Karel Zeman, Jiří Trnka, Jaroslav Boček, Břetislav Pojar, and Jan Švankmajer are among the names of significant animators who contributed to this tradition.

It was directly after the war, when a cartoon was expected—but not always guaranteed—as part of the show, that a short subject by Jiří Trnka appeared in American movie theaters. This Trnka film was *The Animals and the Robbers*, a drawn cel production that had won the Grand Prix at Cannes in 1946. It was an introduction for American film-goers whose only exposure to foreign animation had been through the aforementioned Pal and Oskar Fischinger, whose abstract color work was shown in theaters. Every other cartoon was at that time the product of Hollywood and New York studios.

For those of us accustomed to the brisk pacing of American animation, this import with its leisurely timing was a new experience. Trnka's subtle use of color and the stylization of his characters was a departure from what had always been expected from animated films. Another short that had earned a prize the same year at Cannes was the debut film by Karel Zeman called *A Christmas Dream*, introduced to Americans as a home movie through Castle Films. It combined live actors with puppet characters, suggesting the techniques that would become part of Zeman's repertoire of special effects work.

Recognition for the Czech style came in 1951 with the release of Trnka's *The Emperor's Nightingale*, a puppet feature with a live-action introduction, based on the Hans Christian Andersen tale. Trnka, a magnificent artist, an illustrator of children's books, and a master of puppet theater, revealed these talents in this production. *The Emperor's Nightingale* was more than a cartoon for children; it showed another side of the European sensibility by being a film that had many layers, touching on the conflicts between the mechanical and the human, reason and emotion, the natural and the contrived.

In the United States the move to stylization in cartoons and illustrations had just begun. The UPA studio began to make inroads into the Disney province with characters that resembled those of the European painters and graphic artists—and less like the "lumpy oatmeal" figures of the other Hollywood studios. There was humor and human interest in films that didn't attempt to be recreations of real life, but declared openly that they were composed of mere drawings and painted images. Trnka's figures expressed themselves through simplified actions, every movement choreographed to show only the most necessary emotions. Each character, in the manner of Greek masks, carried a key expression denoting an individual personality. The puppets were pure pantomime accompanied by a haunting music track. Other Czech productions were soon to follow.

Zeman's films began to show up in American theaters and on television in the 1960s with the arrival of *An Invention for Destruction* and *Baron Munchhausen*. Here again the stylized method of storytelling was emphasized through the manipulation of live action, special effects, and animation. While American filmmakers were searching for better ways to create realism in fantasy films, Zeman was employing the look of old line engravings, the kind that illustrated these stories in the 19th century. There was adventure and wonder in these productions, but also a tongue-in-cheek view of a Victorian world of hero, heroine, and the newfound romance of machines. American animators were becoming aware of Zeman and Trnka.

Photographs of Jiří Trnka reveal a stolid, soulful man with heavy-lidded eyes and a bushy mustache. In *Prairie Aria* (1949), he puts himself into the driver's seat of a stagecoach carrying the beautiful heroine and the slimy villain, and satirizes Hollywood westerns. The puppet coachman is a caricature of Trnka, from the chunky body to the bushy mustache. He drinks frequently from a small flask (perhaps another representation of a Trnka habit); when the coachman strikes a match to light his pipe, his mustache is singed into oblivion. Trnka had a wonderful glint of humor in his work, but it is difficult to find a photo or sketch of Trnka smiling. If Trnka twinkled, he may have done it with his eyes; he most assuredly did it with his art. His originality and creativity reflected a mind that could not only infuse his characters with humor, but also, with an economy of design, every other human emotion. Although his films can probe deeper subjects, as in *The Hand* (1965), Trnka's films are never inaccessible to the audience.

The Hand is a very special and important work. Rarely do animated films, with their simple childlike appearance, lead into such a nightmare world as presented here, in which the character, with big round eyes, must confront truth, artistic freedom, integrity, and the right to privacy. Even in *The Fuehrer's Face* (1943), where Donald Duck finds himself in

Jiří Trnka with puppets for *Prairie Aria,* 1949.

a similar situation, the hero finds happily that his ordeal is only a dream. In *The Hand*, however, the protagonist, attempting to overthrow the yoke of the imperious Hand, dies in his effort. Trnka's little man, a potter, is encroached upon by a giant gloved Hand that demands a portrait of itself. It entreats, implores, and commands. The man refuses, but the Hand is persistent. The character finally succumbs, but after producing the sculpted likeness, he destroys it and escapes. But he is hunted down by the Hand and returns to his modest workshop. In his struggle to keep the Hand out of his room, he accidently dislodges a clay pot, is struck on the head, and dies. The Hand, finding the potter among the broken shards, rewards him in death with medals and a state funeral.

When this production arrived in the United States in the 1970s, it was a popular film at colleges and universities, accepted as a commentary on life

behind the Iron Curtain. Audiences wondered how Trnka got *The Hand*'s story line past the authorities since filmmaking was state-sponsored in Czechoslovakia. It is said that he told them that it was a tale about capitalism. Well, why not? Trnka's art is universal; his oppressive Hand obviously represents any authoritarian enterprise, be it government or corporation.

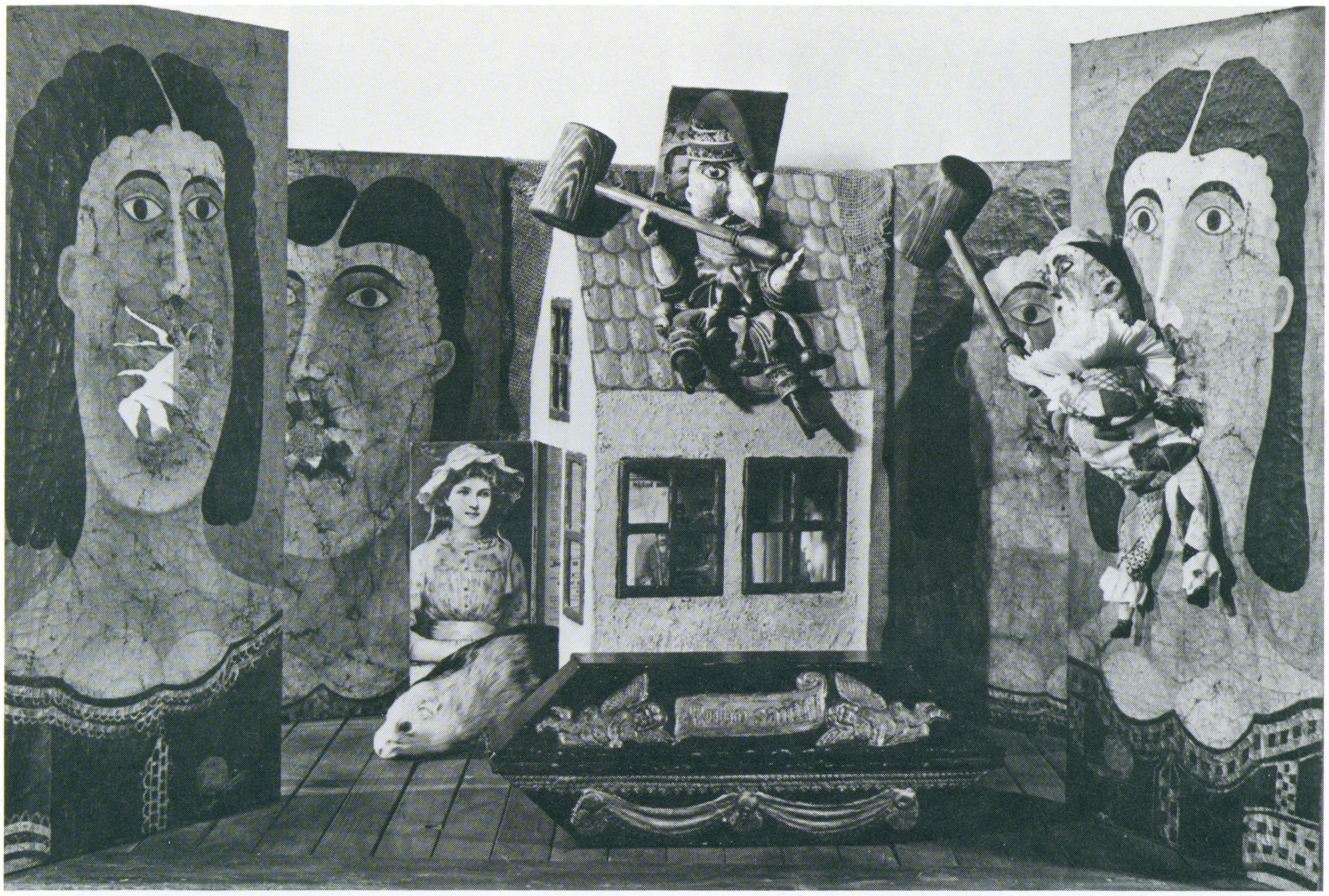
In America, animation is purely for entertainment and it would be unusual to see a cartoon become so serious. It is interesting to play Trnka's *The Hand* on the same bill with another Walt Disney Studio classic, *The Brave Little Tailor* (1938). In this extravagantly conceived and animated short, Mickey Mouse is, like Trnka's little man, an artisan, except that he doesn't work with potter's tools but with a needle and thread. He, too, must overcome an oppressive figure, but here the fearful image is a comic giant that is more brawn than brain as compared to the shrewdly intelligent hand that Trnka has created. Mickey, of course, is triumphant, using his tailor's needle and thread to trip up the big oaf. The cartoon ends happily with the giant bound and sleeping contentedly, the breath from his gargantuan snores twirling a carousel bearing the hero Mickey and his delighted girlfriend Minnie. When screened separately, *The Brave Little Tailor* is received well by audiences, but when shown side by side with *The Hand*, it is the latter film that affects the viewers more and elicits the most discussion.

Trnka died in 1969, passing the torch to other Czech animators, most notably his longtime associate, Břetislav Pojar, who began his career in animation at the age of 19, working at a special effects studio. Eventually he came under the wing of Trnka, becoming the most valuable animator on many of his mentor's productions. Pojar was a director in his own right by age 30, creating the film *A Drop Too Much*, meant to fight alcoholism but also showing Pojar's artistry to excellent advantage. He has directed beautiful and poetic films such as *The Lion and the Tune*, and innovative ones like the exquisite *The Virgin and the Apples*. Under Pojar's guidance, the later Czech puppet films have remained stylized but less rigid. He continues to improve his technique in coproductions with animators in other countries, attesting to the universality of animation.

It was Karel Zeman who contended with the Hollywood giants when he began making fantasy, special effects productions. He was able to command space on the world's marquees not by presenting famous star names, but through mastery of his medium and imaginative use of basic techniques. Zeman began his career working with one of the true pioneers of animation and the Czech cinema, Hermína Týrlová. In 1928, Týrlová was making drawn cartoon films; in the 1930s she and her husband, Karel Dodal, began to experiment with animated puppets. It was to become her medium of choice and she went on to make more than forty films using stop motion. Like Zeman's early films, some of Týrlová's productions would be translated into English and shown on American television. One of these was *Ferda the Ant* (1944).

Before getting into feature-length productions Karel Zeman developed a character called Mr. Prokouk. This "everyman" appeared in short subjects between 1946 and 1959. Zeman's energies, though, were directed increasingly into longer productions. Shots of Zeman at work reveal a smallish man who combines a pixie-like quality with the intense concentration of a devoted scientist, both attributes that are visible in his films. By taking advantage of the single eye of the motion picture camera, Zeman—who could devise a 19th-century world right out of a Jules Verne vision as well as cute little puppet animals—was able to create effects that did not require the precise usage of mattes that drive up the costs of Hollywood fantasy films. In many scenes he was able, by careful planning, to position elements of foreground and background to create combinations in the camera that would appear marvelously convincing. One such scene showed people climbing on the back of a dinosaur. In truth, the dinosaur was a large flat cutout behind which the actors, some distance away, climbed a series of stairs that matched the shape of the cutout. In Zeman's hands, fantasy had a more wondrous quality than many recent productions which would rather convince us that what we see is real. Zeman died in 1989 and a unique form of filmmaking may have died with him. Today, with the accent on large and costly productions, his brand of adventure and humor seems to have disappeared.

The quality that Trnka achieved with *The Hand* may have set a direction for other animators. Jan Švankmajer's films deal with unsettling themes, using antique dolls, machines, furniture, stained bottles, and dusty shelves to create surreal images. Švankmajer has broadened the scope of Czech films, combining collage techniques, exquisite live photography, and stop-motion effects with people and objects.



Set from *Rakvičkárna (Punch and Judy* or *The Coffins),* 1966. Director, design: Jan Švankmajer.

Many writers have sought to put Švankmajer's images into words; they become tongue-tied in the process, but all agree that he is inventive, startling, jarring, and obscure. Švankmajer's protagonists are objects and he has stated that he has always tried to "listen to them and tell their stories." In Švankmajer's world, ideas and things bump up against each other. The viewer is mesmerized by the imagery and the magnificent technique employed; even when perplexed as to the meaning of each scene, there is a staunch resolve to continue to see what else there is to be revealed. *Jabberwocky* (1971), for instance, is a bizarre adventure through the subconscious that makes audiences respond emotionally and physically. Although much of what is shown may seem wacky, the film imagery is mesmerizing. Švankmajer continues the Czech tradition in fantastic and riveting puppet filmmaking and carries it to greater heights. A recent production, *Alice* (1988), is feature length, running over 80 minutes, and depicts a version of the Lewis Carroll classic more surreal than the original. Although *Alice* has been shown in many cities, it plays to specialized audiences and, like all of the great Czech animated productions, it is hard to get to see.

Somehow these masterpieces of animation should be made more accessible to schools and interested audiences. With luck and the many changes taking place in eastern Europe, a channel may open to allow these films to be distributed in the United States. Television should heed the universality of animation, and its potential to reveal the excitement of global cultural variety. How much better to tackle the problems of the world through humor and art, and a popular art at that. Animated films from Czechoslovakia show very clearly that artists can bring charm, beauty, and wonder to the world, even though their message is delivered by messengers that are merely drawn in ink or fashioned from bits of wood and cloth.

Jiří Trnka working on *The Good Soldier Schweig*, 1954.

Animated Film in Czechoslovakia: Past and Present

by Jan Poš

Allow me to begin with a few reflections. Even historians should be permitted to promote their subjects. The only thing that matters is that the praise be substantiated by undistorted facts, events, and accomplishments.

Czechoslovakia is a small central European country. In spite of its size, the Czech part of the country (Bohemia) was a great power during the reign of Charles IV in the 14th century. It was considered a cultural and intellectual center of Europe. In 1621, Czechoslovakia lost its independence and for three hundred years became a politically insignificant part of the Austrian federation under Hapsburg domination, resisting germanization and fighting to preserve its national identity. Even during this time the Czechs were known for their high degree of literacy, rich folk art, creativity, and industriousness. By the 19th century Bohemia was the most industrially developed state within the Austrian Empire.

After the First World War, during the twenty years of its existence, the Czechoslovak Republic was one of the most productive countries in Europe, both culturally and economically. Then the Nazi occupation abolished Czech universities, censored Czech culture, and exploited Czech industry for the needs of the Reich. The post-war communist dictatorship followed suit—only under a different company logo. For all practical purposes, the universities were accessible only to disciples of communism; industry was almost destroyed; and literature, theater, and the mass media were gagged with the muzzle of ideology. However, Czech culture continued developing both abroad, among émigrés—and at home, illegally, underground.

The emergent animated film, both cartoon and puppet animation, was one of the least affected of the arts, in that it actually managed to develop independently of events even after cinema was nationalized. This occurred, perhaps, because the field was not easily accessible to the unskilled and also because it was considered a toy for the children's audience—and not, therefore, to be taken too seriously. The direct causes of the rapid, almost overwhelming, success of the animated film were the high level of Czech creative art, a sense of humor and self-mockery, a respect for this particular film genre, and the individuality and enlightened humanism of the artists who were not inhibited by the herd instinct.

In 1906, an unknown technician of Vitagraph Company adapted a camera for frame-by-frame photography, and the company's owner, James Stuart Blackton, produced *The Haunted Hotel* in which he used the technique of "American Motion"—or animation—for the first time. If we accept this as the birthdate of the animated film, then the beginnings of Czech animation lagged considerably behind. It was not until twenty years later that the Czech graphic artist, Karel Dodal, and his partner Hermína Týrlová, who later directed dozens of successful puppet animations, began experimenting with animated movies. Their first drawn cartoon, *Amorous Water Sprite*, was created in 1928, at a time when Walt Disney was already enjoying tremendous success with Oswald the Rabbit, Mickey Mouse, and Silly Symphonies. Their subsequent movies were described by well-known movie historian Georges Sadoul as follows: "In Czechoslovakia, many years of effort by the artist Dodal and his wife produced remarkable results in *The Adventures of Mr. Pry* which had an educational message, in *The Unforgettable Poster* which was comical in nature, and in several abstract movies."

In 1939, Mr. Dodal fled abroad to escape Nazi expansionism and aggression, while Hermína Týrlová continued her work at Baťa's Studios in Zlín. There, in 1944, she made the first Czech animated puppet film, *Ferda the Ant*, in which she utilized figures with wire armatures.

During the war the Germans took over a small firm called AFIT (a special effects studio) with the intention of building it into a company that would be able to compete with Disney himself. They recruited 120 student-artists from the closed universities

and, under the management of an Austrian named Richard Dillenz, who was a mere dilettante, launched the ridiculous project of animating an opera. After its failure, Czech artists and animators came up with their own ideas for a fanciful fable, *Wedding in the Coral Sea*, which was successfully completed before the end of the war. The film borrowed from the Disney formula, but it already possessed original and masterfully animated passages and a characteristic lighthearted poesy. The film was created by many animators, artists, and directors who were later to become famous, such as Eduard Hofman, Jiří Brdečka, Břetislav Pojar, Václav Bedřich, Jaroslav Kándl, Čeněk Duba, Stanislav Látal, Bohuslav Šrámek, Josef Kluge, among others.

A small group of artists in the Zlín studio was also working on cartoons, but their production was limited to contracted series. From this group emerged directors-animators Zdeněk Miler, Josef Kábrt, and Břetislav Dvořák. Karel Zeman also got his start in Zlín. Together with Hermína Týrlová, he made a remarkable film, *A Christmas Dream*, which combined live action with puppet animation.

So, although the beginnings of Czech animation came considerably late and were a bit unfocused and chaotic, there was evidence of a well-defined and solid basis for the development of this uniquely creative and fantastic film genre.

The foundations for nationalizing Czechoslovak cinematography were already being laid during the war by a group of film workers. This group was joined by young artists and animators from AFIT and, within one month after the end of the war, they founded the first animated film studio, which was later merged with the Prague Short Film Studio. They called this studio "The Trick Brothers." At the time they were well aware that their group did not have a strong artistic personality, and so they asked 33-year-old Jiří Trnka to head the studio. Although young, Trnka was already a versatile and accomplished painter, lithographer, scenographer, and puppeteer, and had previously expressed an interest in working with animated film. With this selection, a foundation was laid not only for the successful beginning, but also for the all-around development of the animated film.

Jiří Trnka grew up in the Czech countryside, primarily outside of industrial Plzeň, whose people and traditions he knew and loved. His grandfather, a village musician, carved puppets and toys out of wood. Trnka's art teacher in high school was Josef Skupa, the founder of contemporary Czech puppet theater. Even as a boy, Trnka was capable of many forms of creative endeavor. When he was seventeen, he exhibited his own puppets in Prague. By the time he took over the management of Trick Brothers, he had already completed his studies at the School of Applied Arts and had numerous works to his credit. A leading contemporary Czech poet, Vítězslav Nezval, described Trnka's activity as "productive dreaming" in which fantasy and poesy are linked with ingenuity, invention, realistic perspective, and creative vitality.

The distinguishing characteristic of Trnka's approach to animation is that he was not intimidated by the complexity of its technology and that he fully comprehended its potential. From the start he respected the organic structure of all the components of filmmaking, but he did not merely accept these passively. He harnessed its concepts to optimize his creative intentions. The artist and filmmaker in him were like two sides of the same coin.

Trnka first entered the new studio on June 5, 1945. By October, he had completed his first ten-minute cartoon, a cheerful little fable entitled *Grandpa Planted a Beet*. The following year, he produced another tale, *The Animals and the Robbers*, followed by *The Gift*, a satire on fashions in art, and an anti-Nazi satire, *Springer and the SS Men* (also translated as *The Chimney Sweep*). These three films represent three different genres and three different creative trends. His second movie, *The Animals and the Robbers*, won the most competitive international festival at Cannes; *Springer and the SS Men* was awarded a prize in Oberhausen. One of the main prizes at Cannes was also awarded to *A Christmas Dream*, a puppet animation by Karel Zeman. Czech films gained their first successes in the international arena because of their simplicity, cordiality, subtle humor, and artistic values. (In this sense, they were somewhat reminiscent of David amidst a horde of Goliaths.)

For all practical purposes, we can consider 1945 as the year that Czech animated film was born. Three personalities stood by its cradle: Hermína Týrlová, Karel Zeman, and Jiří Trnka. It is difficult to trace its history and development because it has been in existence for less than half a century. Many of its pioneers, such as Pojar, Bedřich, and Týrlová, are still creating today—and new names, no less significant, have been added to the list.

There were rich years and there were lean years.

The Czech school of animation is said to be known for its artistic quality, its mastery of animation techniques, its ideological and moral values, and its humor. This all is true: however, there are numerous other important traits in Czech animation. First, there is an absence of uniformity, an intense experimentation and a pronounced individuality. Second, there is a spontaneous, intrinsic egalitarianism. Third, there is an intelligence and a resistance to schematization. Fourth, there is a respect for the language of film, its composition and time-space relationships. And, finally, there is a humanism that verges on self-mockery.

I will briefly mention the conditions in which Czech animation developed. The nationalization of cinema affected it both positively and negatively. On the one hand, the government was providing the financial backing for its development, which, at least in the beginning, made relatively unrestricted activity possible. But later, as the political system developed, it began regulating animation wherever possible. This was especially apparent in the fifties during the reign of Stalinism and Zhdanov's esthetics, and later, in the seventies, during the rigid "normalization" under Brezhnev. In those periods, many subjects were taboo and the creative work of numerous authors was significantly limited.

In its beginnings, animated film production was housed in various locations, workshops and studios, with little space and often with primitive equipment. This disadvantage, however, created one advantage: it led to the formation of small, well-coordinated creative teams whose enthusiasm and dedication contributed to the speedy and inexpensive production of difficult projects. The construction of new, modern studios at Barrandov, a film complex on the outskirts of Prague, considerably disrupted this pattern of team creativity.

Originally, the movies that were made for foreign clients were produced by a separate division (a contract studio). This studio first produced a number of installments for popular series, such as Popeye, Krazy Kat, etc., as well as some individual movies under the direction of Václav Bedřich and Jiří Brdečka, for the Rembrandt-Film Company (William L. Snyder); later, it produced work for Weston Woods (Morton Schindel). A leading American director, Gene Deitch, formerly director with the UPA Company, visited Prague and brought along his rich screenwriting, directing, and organizational experience. There he shot *Nudnik* and *Munro* (for which he received an Oscar), as well as numerous other films in collaboration with leading world artists (Maurice Sendak, James Flora, Tomi Ungerer, Celestino Piatti, Edward Emberley, Pat Hutchinson, Gail Haley, Leo Dillon, Tomie de Paola) and with some Czech artists (Miloslav Jágr, Vratislav Hlavatý, Jaroslav Malák, František Skála). Gene Deitch produced a series of international fairy tales, and made a few films for distribution in Czechoslovakia. His very popular and artistically valuable work received a long succession of significant awards at international festivals. Deitch's collaboration with the Czech animated film industry is a wonderful example of the benefits of international cultural exchange.

Cel from *Nudnik*, 1964–67. Director, design: Gene Deitch.

Within the contract studio's scope of production there was also a vast array of children's television series. Television generated its own screenplays and designated artists and directors. However, this mass production approach did not always yield the best quality. It proved to be very limited, led to over-simplification of story lines as well as animation, and consumed a significant part of the production capacity needed to create programs for distribution in the movie theaters. As a result, production deadlines for the movies were delayed and expenses grew. Movies, however, are the real domain of artistic values in animation and provide the basis for its further development.

The Czech school is also characterized by multi-level relationships between the director, artist, and animator. Jiří Trnka was a classic example of a directing artist, who was also the author and screenwriter of his own films, but who did not do the actual animation. Hermína Týrlová is above all an animator

Set and puppets from *The Czech Year*, 1947. Director, screenplay: Jiří Trnka.

and director, who always worked with other artists and usually with authors and screenwriters. In the forties and fifties, directors who were not also artists were in the majority (e.g., Eduard Hofman, Jiří Brdečka, Václav Bedřich, Břetislav Pojar, and Josef Kluge). The sixties were marked by the emergence of new graduates from the School of Applied Arts in Prague, where they had completed outstanding courses in film and television graphics, taught at first by Adolf Hofmeister, an excellent artist-caricaturist, and later by Miloslav Jágr, an experienced teacher and illustrator. These graduates excelled in drawing, animation, and direction. As a result, this generation produced a constellation of directing artists. Some of them also write and/or animate their films as well (e.g. Václav Mergl, Jana Olexová, Jaroslav Zahradník, Pavel Koutský, Ilja Novák, and Igor Ševčík).

But let's return to the real beginnings in 1946 when Jiří Trnka, after having produced his four films, parted with Trick Brothers in order to devote himself entirely to puppet animation. In the space of one year, in the crowded conditions of an apartment studio, working with a small team of co-workers, he made the first Czech full-length puppet movie, *The Czech Year*. This film approaches the status of a "spectacular." It consists of six sequences and utilizes hundreds of puppets. It shows the customs, work, leisure activity, and everyday life of country people from spring to winter. The puppets were still massive, their movements stiff; wire was used for their joints, and they were hard to animate. But Trnka managed, through masterful choreography and photographic composition, to create swirling motion, genuine atmosphere, and humor. The movie was a tremendous success both at home and abroad, and won a number of prizes at film festivals.

In the meantime, activity on the animated cartoon front, so auspiciously inaugurated by Trnka, also continued. A young director, Čeněk Duba, together with an outstanding artist, Kamil Lhoták, produced a witty and powerful anti-war satire, *Atom at the Crossroads* (1947), which won prizes in

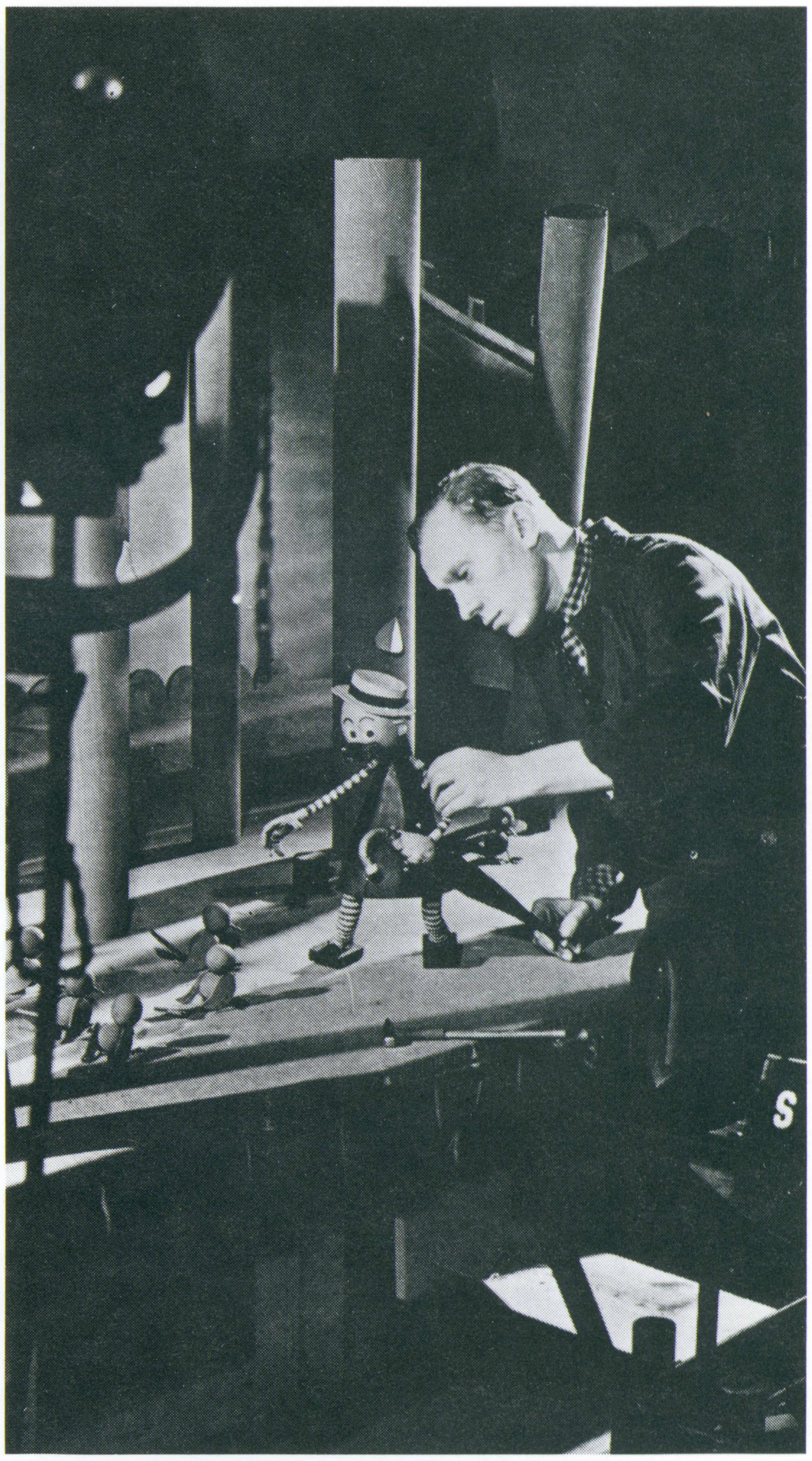
Venice and Bern. In Paris, it won the prestigious Méliès Prize (the French equivalent of an Oscar for the best animated film of the year). Eduard Hofman, one of the founders and organizers of the Trick Brothers Studio, together with artist Frantisek Freiwillig made an enchanting satire on the futility of the struggle between good and evil, *Angel's Coat* (1948). This satire also received a Méliès Prize. Artist Zdeněk Miler produced a contemporary social tale, *The Millionaire Who Stole the Sun* (1948), which he rendered in demanding and evocative pen-and-ink drawings. Trnka's scriptwriting partner, the gentle and cultured Jiří Brdečka, together with Kamil Lhoták, shot *Love and the Zeppelin*, a tale done in the late-19th-century decorative style. This piece received a major prize in Montevideo.

In 1948, Trnka produced another full-length film by himself. In *The Emperor's Nightingale*, based on a story by Hans Christian Andersen, Trnka used the combination of a live-action framework with puppet animation. In this film, Trnka's puppets show more flexibility and development, and Trnka-the-artist competes with Trnka-the-filmmaker and Trnka-the-poet. Again, he received major prizes in New York, Locarno, Paris, and Mariánské Lázně, as well as another Méliès Prize.

The directors of the Zlín Studio were not idle either. In his movie *A Horseshoe for Luck* (1946), Karel Zeman created Mr. Prokouk, a fine puppet of a worried little citizen with glasses and a straw hat, who was seemingly all thumbs. Mr. Prokouk later became a popular hero in many other contemporary topical promos. Zeman the magician achieved the impossible in a poetic and artistically beautiful film, *Inspiration* (1948). In this pantomimic ballet étude, Zeman set figurines of blown glass into graceful motion. The figurines were designed by Professor Jaroslav Brychta, a glassworker from Železný Brod. The film won competitions in Knokke Le Zoute, Yorkton, Dillia, and Montevideo.

Hermína Týrlová also won several competitions with her first postwar films. In *Revolt of the Toys* (1946), she combined pixilated action with animated toys and received recognition in Venice and Brussels. Her next movie, *Lullaby* (1948), in which she sensitively and poetically combined the interplay between a toddler and an animated puppet-toy, won the Venice competition.

In the three years since its inception, Czech animation produced approximately thirty films, including two feature-length movies. Of these,



Karel Zeman working with the puppet character Mr. Prokouk, circa 1950.

twelve became world-famous and contributed to the concept of the "Czech School." It is often said that this school was founded in protest against the film esthetics of Disney. This is not true. All Czech animators appreciated the major part of Disney's work, and in many regards utilized its discoveries. But it is to their credit that they followed their own quite different paths, did not succumb to uniformity, and sought their own relationships to their audiences and to their times.

After this successful debut, the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia took power and there followed a decade of totalitarian dictatorship, characterized by firm ideological rule and artistic stagnation. Only the most capable artists were able to withstand this

Set and puppets for *The Good Soldier Schweig*, 1954. Director: Jiří Trnka.

atmosphere. The animated film, which was suspected of having adopted a critical stance and of being "cosmopolitan" (i.e., anti-regime), was allowed to handle only children's material, and even that material had to be "ideologically safe," literal, and educational. While the volume of output increased slightly, only about four or five animators managed, with difficulty, to preserve their artistic quality.

In the forefront was Jiří Trnka who, in 1949, made three conceptually different films, in which he focused on developing the acting capabilities of the puppet. The first was a Czech horror tale, *The Devil's Mill*; the second was a rewrite of the fragile and ironic story by Chekhov, *The Story of the Double-Bass*; and finally a virtuoso humorous parody of "B"-Westerns, *The Song of the Prairie* (or *Prairie Aria*), which, in addition to the Méliès Prize, earned a number of other festival awards.

In 1950, Trnka made another full-length puppet spectacular based on motifs from the fairy tale *Prince Bayaya* by the famous Czech writer Božena Němcová. With the brilliant display of clowning in *The Happy Circus*, on which he collaborated with other leading artists, he ventured into the technique of cutout animation and received for it, among other awards, another Méliès Prize. Another feature-length epic of puppet animation, *Old Czech Legends* (1952), is a compendium of famous events from the early history of the Czech nation. One of the segments, The Battle of Lutzen, is both a deep analysis of courage and cowardice and one of the most precautionary depictions of the horrors of war in the history of world cinematography. The film received ten significant world trophies and is considered one of the top achievements in cinematography of all time. With this film, Trnka definitely achieved the status of a classic in this area of cinematography.

In 1954, Trnka solemnly concluded his works of this period with another full-length movie consisting of three episodes from the famous novel by Jaroslav Hašek, *The Good Soldier Schweig*. He used the nationally known artistic rendition of Schweig by Czech artist and illustrator Josef Lada. He combined puppet animation with cutout animation; and he

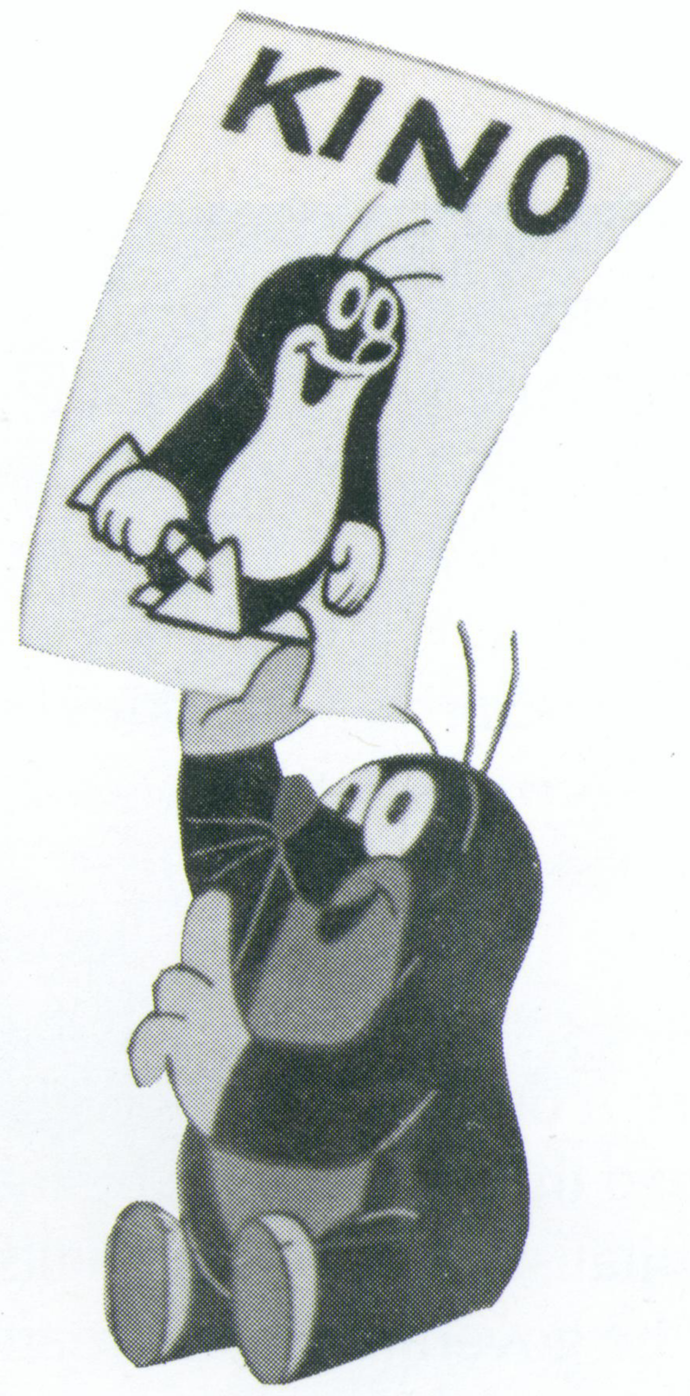
also successfully solved the thorny problem of making puppets talk. The movie won prizes at festivals in Montevideo and Karlovy Vary.

To complete our character sketch of Trnka, we should note that in addition to his own films he also did artistic production on many films by his co-workers (e.g., Stanislav Látal, Břetislav Pojar, Jiří Brdečka). Besides his cinematic activity, he also painted, did excellent illustration on dozens of books, and participated in important exhibits. For him this crossover between cinematic activity and other art forms proved meaningful and provided reciprocal inspiration.

Karel Zeman also managed to overcome the oppressive cultural atmosphere in several of his movies. He successfully continued to produce the stories of Mr. Prokouk and, in 1950, he made a satirical fairy tale entitled *King Lávra*, using puppet animation. In an oriental tale, *The Treasure of Bird Island* (1952), which employed a combination of cartoon-puppet animation, he attempted a full-length piece for the first time. However, Zeman is, above all, an eternal experimenter and inventor who painstakingly seeks out his own artistic identity. He made substantial progress toward this in his next film, *Journey into Prehistory* (1955), where he combined live action with a reconstruction and animation of primeval nature and its life forms.

The gentle and delicate Hermína Týrlová was also seeking her artistic identity. In 1951, she successfully completed another combined-technique film, *The Rag Doll*, in which the actors were children's rag dolls. In *The Nine Chickens* (1952), *The Taming of the Dragon* (1953), *Goldilocks* (1956), and *The Swineherd* (1958), she attempted unsuccessfully to match the language of the educational fable with the medium of the classical puppet. The more epic and literary the fable, and the more literally depicted the puppet, the more helpless Týrlová became. Furthermore, the whimsical animated games through which she could set an object, a simple puppet, in motion and give it character were not considered sufficiently redeeming. She did much better in the poetic study *Misha the Ball* (1956), *A Garland of Folk Songs* (1956), and *Kalamajka* (1957), but she still had not attained her ultimate artistic expression.

These years proved to be fortunate for Břetislav Pojar, Trnka's animator, who had begun his own directing career. In 1953, using Trnka's puppets, he directed a public education piece, *A Drop Too Much*, in which he warned drivers about alcohol



Krtek (The Mole), the cartoon character created by Zdeněk Miler.

consumption. With the exception of Zeman's *Mr. Prokouk* series, this was the first Czech puppet movie in which the puppets were contemporary people. The film is replete with suggestive atmosphere and cinematic temperament. Pojar's next film, *The Little Umbrella* (or *The Brolly*), utilized artists Zdeněk Seydl and Jiří Trnka, and turned out to be a tour de force of puppet fairy-tale theater with respect to animation, art, and direction. Both films received nine significant festival prizes.

Trick Brothers Studio, with its drawn cartoons, which can scarcely exist without allegory, hyperbole, and abbreviation, was especially adversely affected during this decade. Most of the movies made were primarily for children and were characterized by a boring literary story, literally rendered images, and a dragging pace. Perhaps only a loosely linked series based on Čapek's text and drawings for *Stories of the Dog and the Cat* stood above the average. This series was directed by Eduard Hofman.

The only Czech cartoon that succeeded abroad during this period was *How the Mole Got His Pants* (1957) by Zdeněk Miler, a director, artist, and animator. This is a fresh and cheerful tale for children, and its hero belongs among the greatest characters of Czech cartoon art. Six years later, the author returned to this theme, and 22 more segments were produced. Nor did it end there. Half-hour episodes are still in co-production today. The Mole (Krtek) is the oldest Czech cartoon series and its popularity in the country can be compared only to the former popularity of Felix the Cat.

Just as suddenly as the heavy clouds had enveloped Czech animation in 1948, the skies began clearing after 1957. Although not all subjects were allowed, only a very few were expressly forbidden. And while we're discussing weather patterns, I may as well add that by the end of the sixties, after the end of the "Czech Spring," the skies grew heavy again. This becomes particularly noticeable when we follow the work of individual artists. The new government did not appreciate "intellectual treachery" (i.e., talent and criticism); nor did it appreciate "flippant" authors; it demanded ideological discipline and pushed through its own belligerent, properly anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist ideas. However, since the government still yearned for international success and festival laurels, it was from time to time forced to allow truly competent artists to create as well. In spite of this unstable climate, the seventies and beginning of the eighties brought forth a new, talented, and vigorous generation, and perhaps led to a certain "feminization" in the field of animation.

The new boom in animated film toward the end of the fifties saw new creations from its veteran animators, as well as the rise of numerous new directors and artists. The period is characterized by a significant broadening of animation's range of expression in terms of both genre and technique.

Jiří Trnka created a piece that represented the culmination of his mastery of animation, creative imagination, and directorial innovation. This was the full-length wide-screen fairy-tale version of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1959), to which he ingeniously imparted a whimsical dream-like poetry and a deeply human dimension. The puppets in the film drift between abstraction and reality; the filmic vision, the language and composition, the camera's point of view, and the sequences—all this created a rapturous, suggestive, and monolithic whole. The film won awards at several festivals, but Trnka again changed direction.

His *Obsession* (1961) was made with more grotesque and kinetic relief puppets. In it Trnka created a pointed satire on the modern world with its unhealthy yearning for ever-increasing speed, for ruthlessness and risk. Trnka's medium-length *Cybernetic Grandmother* (1962) was also a highly popular film that warned against emotional alienation as a consequence of technocratic evolution. In *The Archangel Gabriel and Miss Goose* (1964), a mischievous Boccaccioesque tale which parodied hypocritical sanctimoniousness, Trnka switched from poetry to a healthy, robust masculinity and irony. He suggestively evoked the atmosphere of Renaissance Venice by using collages and assemblages of the most extraordinary and bizarre materials. These three films also earned a succession of significant awards.

After producing *The Hand* in 1965, Trnka parted with the animated film. (Shortly thereafter, he parted prematurely with life.) Through *The Hand*, a story of a clown/potter who longs to lead his own life and refuses the dictatorship of power, Trnka concluded his work with a most passionate declaration of faith in freedom and humanity and a protest against the brutality of a totalitarian system. The film was understood, admired, and appreciated by the entire world. After five years it was removed from Czech movie theaters and taken out of distribution.

Jiří Trnka was an artist of Renaissance dimensions. His work is not merely the culmination of artistic and cinematic evolutionary trends in Czech and international animation: it is a Renaissance of poesy, imagination, and humanism. None of those who attempted to imitate him succeeded. But those who followed his path of diligent search, artistic humility, spontaneity and originality of emotion and vision have triumphed.

The work of Karel Zeman also reached its zenith at the end of the fifties. He parted with puppets and created a new fantasy genre combining live action with an artistically stylized environment, special effects, and animation. In addition to international success, this earned him the nickname of "The Czech Méliès." His movies of this period include, most importantly, *An Invention for Destruction* (1958), which paraphrased Verne's novel and used Rioux's xylographic illustrations for the sets; and *Baron Munchhausen* (1961), based on Doré's artistic ideas. Zeman did not achieve his triumphs merely because of the deluge of special effects with which he excited the audience, but also because of his poetic style, dry humor, and humanism. Employing the same style, he made the full-length hits, *A Jester's Tale* (1964), *The Stolen Airship* (1966), and *On the Comet* (1970).

Following these daring conquests, Zeman returned to the poetic expression of the fairy tale and to the cartoon and cutout technique in the full-length films, *A Thousand and One Nights* (1974), *Krabat* (1977), and *The Tale of John and Mary* (1980). Zeman's creative work crossed the boundaries of contemporary pictorial capabilities and contributed new dimensions, sophisticated humor,

Hermína Týrlová working on *The Knot in the Handkerchief*, 1958.

and human ethos to both Czech and world cinematography. Although he provided the inspiration, there has, so far, been no direct descendant of Zeman to pick up the thread of his inimitable imagination and originality.

Hermína Týrlová, unconstrained by convention and by the dogmatism of senseless restrictions, also set out on her own well-defined path. She abandoned standard puppets and fairy-tale themes and focused on animating objects, puppet-toys, and various materials which she anthropomorphized not by forcing features on them, but by their action alone. This is how she created delightful and lighthearted pieces such as *The Knot in the Handkerchief* (1958), *The Little Train* (1959), *The Lost Doll* (1959), *Two Balls of Wool* (1962), and *The Marble* (1963).

During the period 1963 through 1969, Týrlová created six "woolly" fairy tales, tender ministories, in which the actors were puppets made of woolen yarn. These pieces represent perhaps the best of what the Czech animated film did for its youngest audience. Týrlová also used crocheted and knitted wool figures successfully in her next series entitled *Tales of the Blue-Eyed Cat* (1974–1976). It may appear that Týrlová, now almost ninety years old and an active artist to the last, had not made any explosive contributions to the evolution of animated film. But, perhaps, no one else ever succeeded in so thoroughly capturing the children's audience, enchanting it, and embracing it with both upbeat ideas and beautiful forms. This accomplishment was confirmed by the dozens—possibly hundreds—of prizes Týrlová earned at domestic and international festivals, as well as by the millions of smiles she put on children's faces.

Hermína Týrlová worked with leading artists,

such as Kamil Lhoták, Zdeněk Miler and Zdeněk Seydl, but her closest collaborator was Ludvík Kadleček, an artist from Zlín. Kadleček is also an outstanding animator and director. At the Zlín Studio, he made a number of films for children. Many of these films pioneered new forms. In a cheerful little tale entitled *Why the Giraffe Cries* (1960), Kadleček cleverly gave motion to actors made from a set of children's paper dolls. In *Prisoner of the Blue Planet* (1962) and *The Bird That Stomped* (1969), he animated by moulding plasticine. He used the same technique when he worked with artist Zdeněk Seydl on a loosely linked experimental series between 1970 and 1972, and when he made a horror farce entitled *Boo-boo-boo* with ceramist Pravoslav Rada.

In Prague, Břetislav Pojar focused systematically on animated puppets. At that time he worked in a small new studio, a former masonry shop. His *The Lion and the Song*, an allegorical fable he created in 1959 with artist Zdeněk Seydl, reminds us of the immortality of a work of art. This film earned international recognition for its dramatic lyricism, virtuoso animation, and powerful concept. After two satirical cartoons entitled *Fame* and *Bombomania* (1959), and a superb trilogy consisting of *School for Cats*, *A Cat's Word of Honor*, and *Drawing for Cats* (1960–1961), on which he worked with artist Miroslav Štěpánek and which received a number of prizes, Pojar made four films aimed at the adult audience. These were contemporary satirical films in which Pojar employed the specific technique of animating relief puppets. In *Billiards* (made in 1961 with artist Zdeněk Seydl), he satirized subordination to power. *The Introductory Speech Is By . . .* (also translated as *A Few Words of Introduction*) was made in 1962 with Zdeněk Seydl, and is a virtuoso satire on pompous prattling in which not one word is uttered. Its brilliant inventiveness was rewarded with seven international prizes. For his subsequent satires, *Romance* (1963) and *Ideal* (1963), Pojar even did his own artwork.

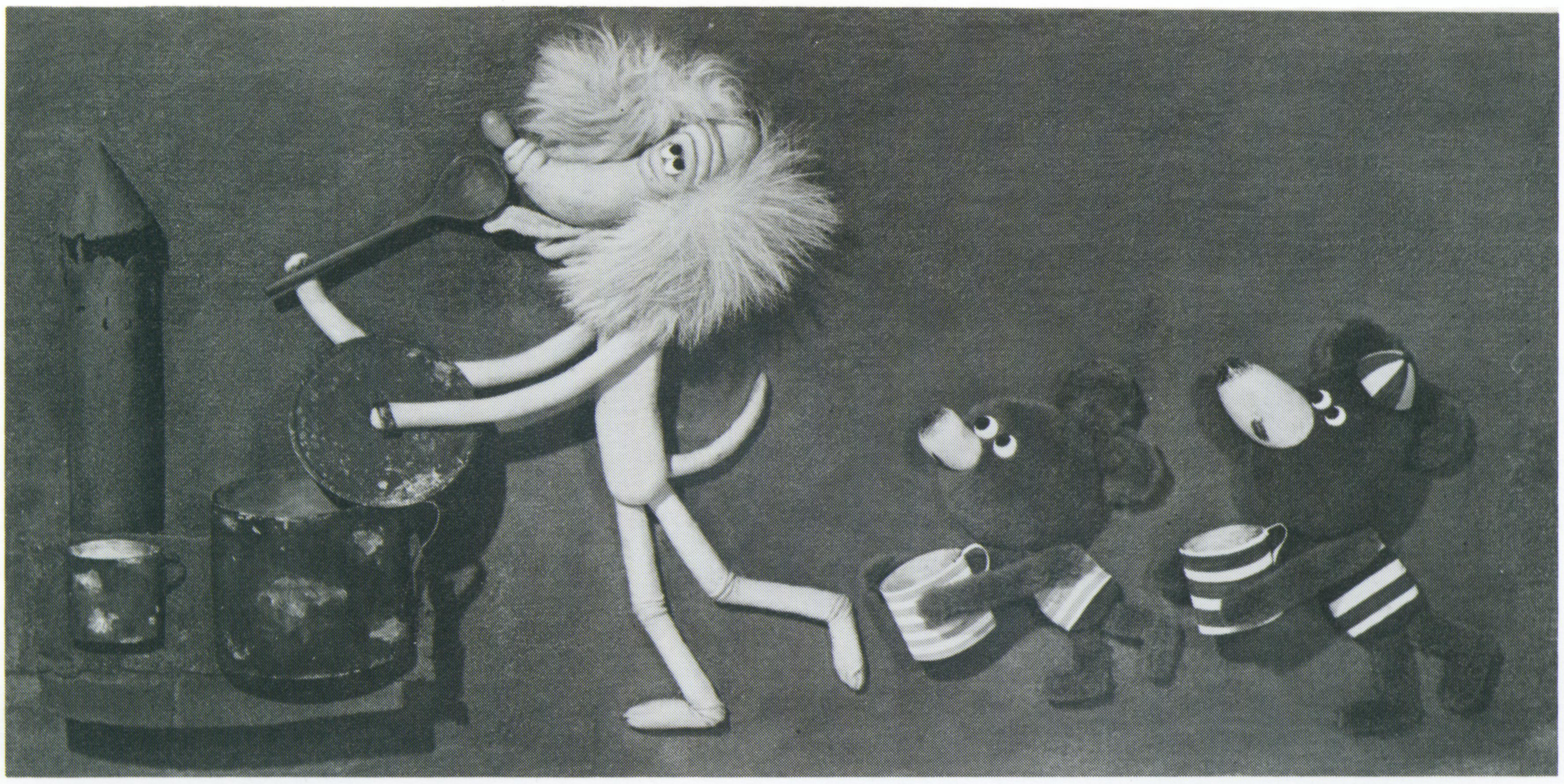
Experienced scriptwriter Ivan Urbanek and eminent artist Miroslav Štěpánek created an eleven-part series of adventures, featuring two brotherly bears, entitled *They Met Near Kolín* (1965–1973). This became the best and most successful Czech animated puppet series of all time thanks to its contemporary, intelligent humor, artistic values, and inventive direction and animation. Although the series depends to a great extent on vocal interpretation, it was enthusiastically received abroad. Another successful five-part series of films created with relief puppets was inspired by Trnka's book *The Garden* (1974–1977). The artwork for it was also done by Štěpánek. A seven-part series *Dashenka* (1977–1979) was based on a popular book by Karel Čapek. It was made by combining shots of live settings with cutout animation of Štěpánek's drawings.

A masterpiece of the classical puppet animation film from the post-Trnka period was a poetic fairy tale entitled *The Apple Tree Maiden* (1973), in which Štěpánek created an enchanting artistic environment through his actors and scenery. The ballad-like *Imagery in the Darkness* (1985) was a co-production with the National Film Board of Canada, with which (as did Norman McLaren) Pojar had a longstanding work and personal relationship. This film is a combination of puppet-actors with pinboard technique, which was used to animate other elements of the film. A Canadian artist named Jacques Druin created the boards for the pin animation.

Satirical morality plays shot with cutout technique comprise a distinctive side of Pojar's work. The first, called *Anti-Darwin* (1969), was made with Štěpánek. In his subsequent satires, *Illusionology* (1969), *Balablock* (1973), *Why People Have Dogs* (1979), *Boom* (1979), and *If* (1981), Pojar did the artwork himself. These films also earned a succession of festival laurels for their thought-provoking ideas, the wit of their metaphors, and their lively pace. Although Pojar was himself not an artist *per se*, he was the only one who purposefully dedicated his efforts to the further development of the classical and relief puppet, both during Trnka's life and after his passing.

Director-animator Josef Kluge of Pojar's studio also focused on puppet animation. His first success was *The Brave Chicken* (made in 1960 with artist Miloš Nesvadba), which earned The Golden Lion Award in Venice for its simplicity and warmth. Two contemporary satires entitled *It's Not Much, But It's Mine* (1962) and *The Solid Grandfather* (1963), for which the artwork was done by Štěpánek, contributed to developing the prototype of the puppet in contemporary dress. Kamil Lhoták's puppets in Kluge's *Xantippa and Socrates* (1961), a mischievous science fiction film, were also remarkable.

During the period 1964–1965, Kluge and artist Jan Brychta produced three puppet films, witty adaptations of O. Henry's stories *The Whirligig of Life*, *The Hiding of Black Bill*, and *The Cop and the Anthem*. His subsequent works, entitled *Why We Don't Have Legs* (1967), *Our Faithful Love* (1967), *The Gossips* (1967), and *The Helpers* (1968), were



Relief puppets for the 1965–73 series, *They Met Near Kolín*. Director: Břetislav Pojar. Design: Miroslav Štěpánek. Screenplay: Ivan Urbanek.

Scene from *Imagery in the Darkness*, 1986. Director, design: Břetislav Pojar, J. Drouin. Story, screenplay: Břetislav Pojar.

Lady Poverty, 1983. Director: Vlasta Pospíšilová. Story, screenplay: Milan Pavlík. Design: Šárka Vachová.

pointed satires on which he collaborated with artist Hana Štěpánová. In these films he combined relief puppets with cutout technique. He remained faithful to cutout animation technique in his seven-part series of hunters' tall tales, entitled *Careful, There's Shooting Going on Here* (1972–1978), energetically drawn by František Skála, and in the twenty-six-part *Tales of Mikeš the Cat* (1970–1977), a film based on the book and drawings of Josef Lada.

Jaroslav Zahradník also played a significant role in Pojar's studio. In his three whimsical cartoons *The Clay Pot* (1972), *A Walk* (1972), and *On the Rope* (1973), he used puppets made of modurite, animated by moulding their shape. Zahradník is one of the few consistently creative authors in the field of puppet animation whose ugly yet beautifully human-like actors influenced an entire constellation of artists both at home and abroad after his premature and tragic death.

Film critic and theoretician Jaroslav Boček took up directing in Trnka's tradition. Together with Dagmar Berková, a sensitive artist, he made three classical puppet films, entitled *Svatopluk and His Sons* (1968), *The Widow from Efez* (1971), and *Three Studies for the Animator* (1977), of which particularly the first and last earned significant awards. His next two films, which he produced with artist Zdeněk Pilar, entitled *The Sculptress of Polička* (1970) and *Brave Kate* (1972), were already far removed from Trnka's lyrical style. After these films, Boček concentrated only on cutout animation and on cartoons. Of these, three stand out: *The Story of a Tiger Cat* (made in 1977 with artist Jiří Salamoun), *The Musician's Tale* (made in 1980 with artist J. Kalousek), and *Och, Shatlandy* (made in 1978 with artist Jiří Kovařík).

Vlasta Pospíšilová, an outstanding animator, also turned to directing puppet animation with the films

Maryška and the Wolf's Castle (made in 1979 with artist Dagmar Berková), *Lady Poverty* (made in 1983 with artist Šárka Vachová), and *Greedy Barka* (1988). The last film, in particular, which was based on Jan Werich's mischievous model and utilized Petr Poš's expressive puppets and sets, fully displayed Pospíšilová's talent of creating characters with her virtuoso puppet action.

Animator Lubomír Beneš, whose innovative partner was Jan Tipman, also basically followed in Trnka's footsteps in his three successful animated puppet films, *The King and the Goblin* (or *The Midas Touch*, 1980), *The Musician and Death* (1984), and *Horns* (1986). These films also earned a series of prizes and contributed to maintaining the reputation of Czech puppet animation.

Artist Milada Kučerová also created a remarkable, expressively stylized puppet and employed it splendidly in the historical films entitled *Master Hanuš* (1976, directed by Garik Seko); *House of Faust* (1977, directed by Garik Seko); *Daliborka* and *Jerusalemská Street* (1978, directed by Ivan Renč).

Significant and trend-setting contributions to the evolution of Czech film puppetry also came from the isolated work of those directors and artists who otherwise specialized in other areas of animation. Foremost among these works is the excellent *Doctor Johanes Faust* (1958), a film produced by director Emil Radok and artist V. Beneš, which evokes the magic of old Czech marionettes. Animator Stanislava Prochazkova created remarkably expressive and distinctive puppets for a comic opera called *The Crooked Chimney* (1968), which was successfully directed by her husband, animator Pavel Procházka. Artist Radek Pilař, in *A Song for Glass Chips* (directed in 1967 by V. Bedřich), worked with "actors" made of broken glass. Outstanding draftsman Adolf Born designed romantic puppets for the feature-length film *Robinson Crusoe* (1981, directed by Stanislav Látal). Artist Jaromír Gál made modern phantasmagorical puppets for Renč's film *The Lighthouse Keeper*. Artist-director Dagmar Doubková designed smart and lively puppets as well as anecdotal settings for her version of Andersen's fairy tale, *The Tinderbox* (1985). This film also received numerous international prizes.

The development of the Czech puppet film was determined not by some inherent esthetic preconception, but rather by a contemporary and distinctive posture which constantly approached a universal, humanistic philosophy. But the evolution

Puppet for title character of *Greedy Barka,* 1988. Director: Vlasta Pospíšilova. Design: Petr Poš.

of the Czech cartoon is consistent only in its final stages. After ten years of suppression, it came to life suddenly and at a high level.

The artistic director of the Trick Brothers Studio attracted attention by directing a vigorous, full-length "musical" cartoon entitled *The Creation of the World* (1958), which was inspired by a series of drawings by French artist Jean Effel. A year later, Hofman produced an experimental satire called *A Dozen of My Daddies* with artwork by twelve leading Czech artists. During the period 1959–1973, Hofman made a seven-part series of fairy tales inspired by the literary motifs of Karel Čapek and the illustrations of Josef Čapek. Hofman was, above all, an excellent organizer who later became involved in directing conventional live-action films, creating television films—both animated and live-action—and lecturing at the School of Applied Arts (VSUP).

In 1958, the sophisticated, cultured Jiří Brdečka returned to cartoons as a scriptwriter. He collaborated again with Kamil Lhoták on the tongue-in-cheek history of aviation, called *How Man Learned to Fly*, in which he combined drawn animated sequences with old documentary footage. With artist Zdeněk Seydl, he produced an impactful and dynamic anti-war satire entitled *Attention!* (1959) and a philosophical wide-angle essay called *Reason and Emotion* (1962). Together with Vratislav Hlavatý he did a parody on the American folk song *My Darling Clementine* (1959) for Rembrandt-Film Company; with Jaroslav Malák, he made another song for the same company, *The Frozen Logger*.

In 1963, together with Malák and Seydl, Brdečka made *A Badly Painted Hen* (1963), which is a most clever indictment of dull mediocrity. It is also a celebration of fantasy and imagination. The film received eight prizes and in the seventies was taken out of distribution. Brdečka's *The Blessing of Love* (1966) was equally successful. The artwork was sensitively done by Jiří Trnka (this was Trnka's final film). A little tale of a spider and his poet friend, entitled *Love* (made in 1978 with eminent graphic artist, Jiří Salamoun) is a heartrending account of human ingratitude. His adaptation of Gerard de Nerval's horror story, called *The Vengeance*, with artwork by Miroslav Štěpánek, is an artistic and cinematic jewel.

In addition to these classical cartoons, Brdečka made films in which animation was secondary and which could be placed in the category of pure artistic film poetry. Primarily, these include film versions of folk songs, such as *The Letter M* (1964, with artwork by L. Jiřincová), *The Forester's Song* (1966, with artwork by F. Braun), and *There was a Miller on the River* (1971, with artwork by Eva Švankmajerová). These films do not merely illustrate the text of the songs, but generate for them a unique pictorial counterpoint. *Metamorpheus*, an antique fable made in 1963 with artist Vladimír Kladiva, and Wilde's story *What I Didn't Say to the Prince* (made in 1975 with artist Jitka Walterová), are composed along similar lines.

In addition to the thirty films which Brdečka directed himself and which earned around sixty significant awards, he also worked on dozens of his colleagues' scripts and themes, as well as on numerous scripts for live-action films. In the area of cartoon animation, Brdečka discovered dozens of artists and introduced a number of new trends and processes. However, his most important contribution was his consistent development of unique animation techniques and his exceptionally cultured expression, be it in the areas of satirical invention, philosophy, or artistic lyricism. A number of Brdečka's films belong to the treasured heritage of world animation.

Another no less significant trend in Czech cartoon films is represented by Václav Bedřich. He also started at AFIT and went through a period of directing animated commercials and promos, which also included a few "errors" made in the fifties. As a chief animator and director in the contract department of the cartoon film studio, he made dozens of episodes of popular series, such as *Popeye*, *Tom and Jerry*, *Madeline*, etc., together with Gene Deitch. By now his name is associated with almost three hundred titles, and he is considered a master of professionalism. But this title alone does not do sufficient justice to his significance. He also contributed substantially to the development of various techniques and genres. While his main focus was the satirical-grotesque cartoon, he also creatively experimented with the film puppet, perfected the cutout technique, and demonstrated an ability to be poetic and dramatic. Although he was a skilled draftsman, he kept finding new artists for his films, and always helped them understand the essential requirements of animation.

His films *Forty Old Men* (made in 1962 with Miroslav Štěpánek), *The Last Shot* (made in 1963 with Vratislav Hlavatý), and a three-part series based on Stevens' *Strong Bill* (made in 1964–1972

The cartoon character *Maxidog Fik,* created by Jiří Šalamoun.

with artwork by Štěpánek) were typical examples of modern "crazy cartoons." His seven-part series of parodies of "B"-horror movies, using cutout animation and entitled *Deadly Odor* (made in 1969–1976 with artists Vladimír Kladiva, Jaroslav Vožniak, and František Braun), had superb atmosphere, gags, animation, and clever story lines. Together with the eminent artist Vladimír Jiranek, Bedřich created flawless, contemporary minicartoons with human and satirical overtones called *Automatic* (1973), *Beer Across the Street* (1974), *Good Morning* (1975), *Thank You, Gentlemen* (1976), and a successful, idea-packed series called *Bob and Bobek, Rabbits Out of the Hat* (1978–1980).

In cooperation with Jiří Šalamoun, a modern graphic artist and illustrator of distinctive style, Bedřich did an adaptation of the famous Chekhov story *Kashtanka* (1976) and *Maxidog Fik*, a 28-part series produced in 1975–1980. Thanks to its creative lapidary style, lively pace, and topicality of action and lines, this series became one of the most successful evening programs on Czech television.

Bedřich's films also received a number of international awards. An even more important contribution to the development of Czech animation was Bedřich's ability to combine a high level of professionalism with energy, restlessness, and emotion, which he always applied to the discovery and mastery of new trends and genres. His films are almost always audience-pleasers without being sycophantic. Bedřich also knew how to maximize the creative personality of the artist with whom he worked, but without altering his own unique directorial stamp.

Scene from *The Frightening of Bumblebees.* Director: Zdeněk Smetana.

Animator and artist Zdeněk Smetana was an equally prolific and popular director. He made his directorial debut in the fifties, with several commercials, followed in the sixties by a successful series of didactic public education films for which he also did the artwork. In his loosely linked series *Romanetto, A Bottle and the World, A Garland, An Umbrella*, and *The Spectacles* (1963–1964), Smetana created a rewarding characterization of the eternal hard-luck case. These brilliantly animated "pathetic" satirical cartoons possess an artistic charm and touchingly human dimensions.

In his mischievous folk tales full of earthy humor, entitled *Water of Freshness* (1966) and *Všehochlup* (1978), Smetana worked primarily with relief puppets. His other satirical cartoons *Prometheus* (1965), *Problematorium* (1967), *The Archers* (1968), and *The End of a Cube* (1979) were also successful. Among his most popular works was the twenty-six-part television series, *Tales from the Moss and Ferns*, whose central characters are the wood gnomes Křemílek and Vochomůrka. Smetana's full-length fairy tale *The Little Witch* (1983) was also very well received. However, some of his attempts at political allegory, which is alien to the spirit of animated film, proved less successful. Smetana's work was most elevating when it drew on his own creative intent, when it added to the insightful detailing of human nature, and when it underscored the absurd conflicts between reason and emotion.

Josef Kábrt and Vladimír Lehký also belonged to this group of prolific directors and animators. However, they did not particularly excel in the artwork that they usually did for their films. Kábrt received attention for his splendidly animated antiwar satire *The Iron Hat* (1961); his production of Wilde's story *The Nightingale and The Rose* (1967), in which he attempted to bring to life the artistic graphics of Aubrey Beardsley; and for his collaboration on a full-length co-production of a cutout

Scene from *Robinson Crusoe,* 1981. Director: Stanislav Látal. Design: Adolf Born.

animated film, *The Wild Planet*, which was directed by René Laloux with artwork by Roland Topor.

Eminent animator Vladimír Lehký was first noticed for his cartoon entitled *Three Men* (1959) and a multiple-screen cartoon *Parasite* (1960). But it was his *Ptáci Koháci* (1965), a contemporary cartoon fable with deep humanistic content, with script and artistic design by Jiří Toman, that has become a major milestone in cartoon animation for its virtuoso animation and direction.

An equally significant work was *A Place in the Sun* (1959), a fanciful piece by director-animator-artist František Vystrčil, which places a strong emphasis on human coexistence. This work, executed in simple kohl sketching, earned seven significant international awards. Later, Vystrčil made several more successful satirical cartoons entitled *Start* (1964), *A Square* (1965), *The Launch Site* (1969), *Scissors* (1970, with artist Adolf Born), and *Quotes* (1973, with artist Jiří Kalousek).

Stanislav Látal, an experienced Trnka animator, excelled in directing three cutout animation films called *How to Acquire a Good Child* (1965), *Otýlie and 1,580 Ink Blobs* (1965), and *Let Sleeping Mammoths Lie* (1967). Miloš Macourek was the quintessentially contemporary creator of these films; the artwork was done by the energetic artist Jan Brychta. In addition to a deluge of excellent gags, these "crazy morality plays" were remarkable for their novel, clever, and contemporary approach to today's child. In 1981, Látal produced the complex full-length puppet animation film *Robinson Crusoe*, with artwork by Adolf Born, and in 1986 he completed three more episodes of Hašek's *Schweig*; but these did not stand up against Trnka's originals.

Animator Božena Možíšová also addressed the children's audience with erudite work. Her series of stories about little Dorothy (1971–1978), made in collaboration with Jiří Kalousek, were lively and vigorous.

Title characters from the series, *Mach and Šebestová,* 1967–85. Directors, screenplay: Adolf Born, Jaroslav Doubrava, Miloš Macourek. Story: Miloš Macourek. Design: Adolf Born.

One of the most successful series and one that has the most episodes, is director Ladislav Čapek's *Rumcajs the Bandit* (1967–1989), which was made in cooperation with artist Radek Pilař. These simple, charming tales—full of humor, imagination, unobtrusive goodness, and lively drawings—have literally become part of the nation's culture.

Mach and Šebestová (1967–1985), the work of a team of three—Macourek, Born, and Doubrava—also deserves one of the first places in this group of valuable and clever series. Miloš Macourek, a poet, writer, and scriptwriter, authored over 50 plots for animated films. Adolf Born, an excellent caricaturist, lithographer, and illustrator, did the artwork for at least as many films. The track record of leading animator Jaroslav Doubrava is equally impressive. *Mach and Šebestová* tells of the owners of a magic phone that can grant any wish. This generates a plethora of situations, both ordinary and miraculous, but always entertaining and aimed at contemporary children in their own language.

In addition to this series, this highly coordinated creative team produced satirical morality plays which were honored by dozens of festival awards, including *What If...* (1972), *From the Life of Birds* (1973), *Nonsense* (1974), *Hugo and Bobo* (1975), *From the Life of Children* (1977), and *Mathilde with the Extra Head* (1985). It is precisely the work of this team that proves conclusively that innovation, imagination, and talent are the main ingredients for conveying even the deepest thoughts in a captivating, entertaining, and attractive manner. These are the central characteristics of the Czech school of animation.

We will now part with the work of the elder generation of directors. We have already discussed the difficulties of doing a historical and generational categorization of such a young field. It is a fact, nevertheless, that a new wave of creators, mostly artists, emerged around the mid-sixties. By now these have also become fifty-year-old veterans.

Pojar's animator, Pavel Procházka, made his directorial debut in 1964 with the satirical fairy tale cutout entitled *The Confused Planet*, with artwork by Eva Šedivá. Jan Švankmajer made his debut as an animation artist in Procházka's idea-packed satire *Ciphers* (1965), a cutout animation. *Holdup*, a parody of chase cartoons made in 1967 with artist Josef Kábrt, and a puppet opera called *The Crooked Chimney* (1968) were also very successful. However, Pavel Procházka emigrated after the 1968 occupation of Czechoslovakia by Warsaw Pact forces.

A former cameraman, Ivan Renč, showed a promising start as a director when, in 1965, together with eminent self-taught artist František Braun, he made a poetic cutout animation *The Magician*. He and Jaromir Gál, a pupil of A. Hoffmeister, created

remarkable satirical morality plays: *How a Woman Got Hold of the Letters* (1967); *The Anthill* (1968); a cutout *The Singing Ship* (1971); and puppet animations, *The Lighthouse Keeper* (1968) and *The Bowling Pins* (1974). Together with Miroslav Štěpánek, Renč made cautionary satires entitled *The Sword* (1967) and *A City in Mourning* (1968). With his trilogy *A Man and a Puppet* (1981), he won first place at the Berlin Festival. However, by this time his bitterly lyrical talent was exhausted, and his subsequent prolific work focused mostly on commercial production.

The early career of Jana Olexová, a graduate of the School of Applied Arts was equally hopeful. In 1964, she made her debut with two whimsical pieces, *Legerdemain* and *April*, in which she masterfully animated various objects. Her artistically innovative and expressive puppet animations, *Genesis* (1966) and *The Meeting* (1968), were unconventional and powerful. However, after a 12-year pause, she made only two additional and less significant films.

Václav Mergl, another graduate of Professor Hoffmeister's studio, in his first film, *Metamorphoses* (1964), already demonstrated that he was an artist with a solid foundation and contemporary expression, as well as a director-analyst and synthesizer of internal and external dramatic pathos. His subsequent films, *Laokoon* (1970), *The Crabs* (1976), and *Homunculus* (1984), stake out new creative territory for the philosophical-utopian cautionary fable. In addition to these key films, which received a number of awards, Mergl worked on various series which he sought to maintain on a high artistic plane.

Lenka Naibauerová and Pavla Řezníčková, students of the Studio for Film and Television Graphic Arts, came on stage briefly but notably. They enriched the artistic vocabulary of film humor with a naughtily loony contemporary approach. Řezníčková concentrated on a bizarre hyperbole of black humor in *The Illustrated Woman* (1969), *Big-Eared Cecilie* (1973), and *Carnivorous Julie* (1975). Naibauerová focused on naive folk lyricism in *The Old Maid* (1971) and *Shepherd's Music* (1974).

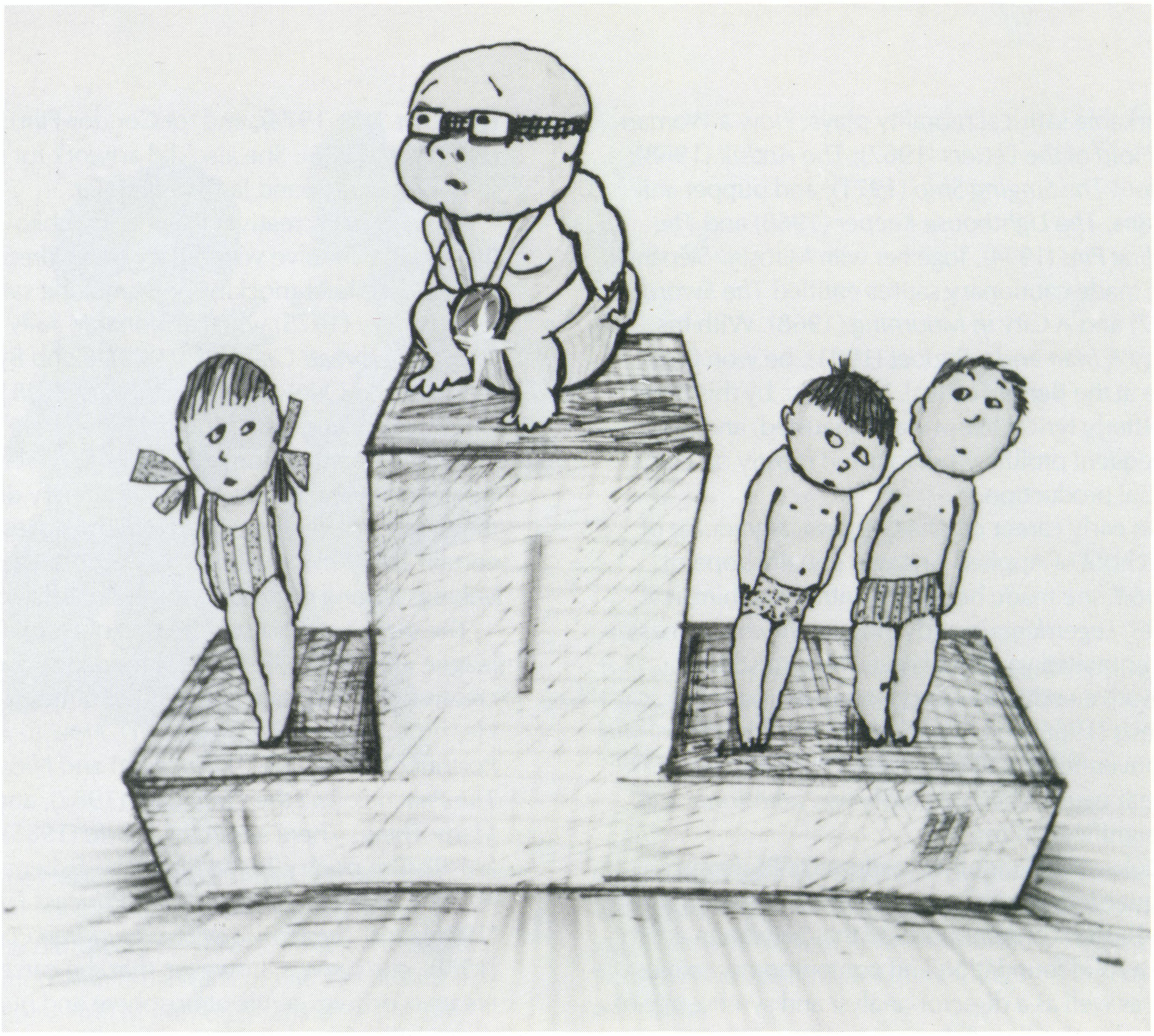
Eva Švankmajerová supplemented the creative vocabulary of animated film through oil painting techniques, strong composition, and multilevel semantic structures with her designs both for Brdečka's ballad *There was a Miller on the River* (1971), and with her work for Laterna Magica (*The Lost Tale*, 1974), and for Condor-Film Zurich (*Jost Burgi*, 1986). She also did artwork for some films by her husband Jan Švankmajer.

Versatile and creative, Dagmar Doubková enlivened the creative vocabulary of children's films. She followed her mocking anti-smoking satire *Eternal Memory* (1975) with *Fashionable Sally* (1976), *The Gingerbread Grandpa* (1977), *Good Bye, Ophelia* and *Queen Scooter, the First* (1981). These satirical fairy tales and morality plays were made using cutout animation technique, and were awarded several prizes. We have already discussed the success of her film, *The Tinderbox*. Despite a certain arhythmic quality in her scripts, Doubková belongs among our most promising artists.

The same can basically be said of Doubková's colleague and classmate Nina Čampulková, whose creative and thematic interests are quite different. Her films *Poetic Exercises* (1971), *How to Paint a Portrait of a Bird* (1973), *Aucassin and Nicoletta*, *The Peacock isn't the Only One* (1982), and *How Many Things There are in the World* (1985) are true artistic film poetry. In the films *The Fisherman That Never Caught Anything* (1984), *Princess Furiena* (1986), and *The House of Five Hundred Poets* (1988), she proved, however, that she can also create sensitive, gentle atmosphere and humor even in films that have a narrative basis.

Petr Sís, another graduate of the School of Applied Arts, made a brief and significant appearance. In his *Island of 6,000 Alarm Clocks* (1977), he created a lighthearted topical satire in cutout animation. In *The Heads* (1979), he innovatively evoked and updated the painter Arcimboldo; and in *The Gamblers* (1982), which was made with John Halas, he used an emotive metaphor to create a passionate indictment of aggression.

Igor Ševčík is a self-taught artist who gained his first artistic, animating and directing experiences as an amateur filmmaker. He drew and animated his first films, *Siesta* (1977), *Relationships* (1978), *The Morning* (1979), and *The Campaign* (1980), in a continuous succession of changing shapes, as though the action were filmed in one shot. His subsequent satirical fables, *The Hunter* (1985), *The Probe* (1986), *My Friend Al* (1987), and *Innocent Games* (1987), are also animated in an intense, swirling pace. Ševčík also worked as an artist in live-action films, for which he shot animated introductions. His trademark contribution to cartoon art is his provocative "jolting of the audience."



Scene from *What Is Your Opinion Baron?*, 1984. Director, design: Ilja Novák.

The work of Ilja Novák, an animator from the Prometheus Studio in Ostrava, is similar to Ševčík's as far as drawing style and energy are concerned. But his artwork is even rougher, less coiffed, and the gags and punchlines of his altogether ironic films are even more merciless. His *The Conspirators* (1979), *Once Upon a Time, There was an Island* (1980), *What is Your Opinion, Baron?* (1984), *His Excellency* (1985), *The Robinsons* (1986), and *Ciska* (1986) have earned many awards abroad thanks to their uncompromising and forceful expression; they earned none, however, in "normalized" Czechoslovakia.

Pavel Koutský received his first laurels for amateur filmmaking when he was only fourteen. The thesis film which he produced for his graduation from the School of Applied Arts, titled *Visit Prague* (1983), is a clever parody of the tourists' race to sight-see cultural monuments. In addition to other awards, the film earned a Golden Plaque at the Chicago International Film Festival. *Curriculum Vitae* (1986), is a speeded-up montage of everything that forms and deforms a person during one's education, beginning with the multiplication tables through college graduation. It is also a declaration of love for cartoon clowning, personified by a determinedly scurrying Mickey Mouse-like figure that weaves through various encounters with Scholarship and Art. The film received seven major prizes, including those awarded by the audience and by the press, in Berlin and in Moscow.

Koutský is not a satirist, nor is he a philosophizing moralist. He is an ironic observer, a glossarist. He is clearly a follower of Saul Steinberg, a veteran of the modern satirical drawing, though not so much in form as in his views of the world of thought. Koutský animated every frame of the approximately fifteen films he has made to date. He also authored their

Scene from *Visit Prague,* 1983. Director, design, screenplay: Pavel Koutský. Story: Miloslav Jagr, Pavel Koutský.

themes and developed the scripts. His films also produce the impression of one continous shot, an uninterrupted chain of changes in shape, a stream of gags and escapades. He confirmed again that in the animated film, a plot alone is not enough; it is imperative that something be happening all the time, no matter how much work it requires. And, indeed, it is spontaneous, healthy, intelligent, and universally understandable humor that requires the most work.

It is not an easy task to write a brief history of artistic activity that already encompasses thousands of titles and hundreds of artists' and directors' names. One may select only the most prolific and successful ones, but cannot overlook the youngest and most promising artists who are largely graduates of the School of Applied Arts. The list includes František Skála, Jr. (*The Eyes*, 1983), Zuzana Vorlíčková (*Laterna Musica*, *The Fate*, 1990), Lucie Dvořáková (*The Hen*, 1984, *The Swing*, 1985), Petra Fundová (*A Blackbird in the Park*, 1984, *The Snowman*, 1985), Marcela Halousková (*Poetic Exercises*, 1972, *The Vixen from Karlín*, 1972), Michaela Pavlátová (*An Étude from the Album*, 1987, The *Crossword Puzzle*, 1988), Marie Satrapová (*How the Whale was Sick*, 1975, *A Magic Fish Bone* (1980), Pavel Sivko (*I Didn't Want to Kill Birds*, 1986), Milada Sukdoláková (*The Stone Organ*, 1984, *A Sentimental Tale*, 1988), Blanka Šperková (*The Story of Muran*, 1975, *White Dreams*, 1986), Vladimír Wimmer (*The Boiling*, 1986), Ondrej Slivka (*The Juggler*, 1987, *If I Were a Bird*, 1987), Šárka Ziková (*Prague Bridges*, 1984), and Šarlota Zahrádková (*The Snake is a Train*, 1986, and *The Little Pink Pig*, 1989). These artists are characterized by a broad spectrum of genres and a wide creative range, as well as by highly individualized styles which promise new inspiration for future work.

The Extinct World of Gloves, 1982. Director, screenplay, design: Jiří Barta. Story: Boris Hybner.

Two individuals were intentionally saved for the conclusion of this cross-sectional look at Czech animation. These artist-authors are difficult to categorize, yet they both typify current trends.

The younger of the two, Jiří Barta, completed his studies at the Studio for Film and Television Graphic Arts under Professor M. Jágr in 1975 by producing a small cutout satire entitled *Spirituals*. He continued to work at the school as an assistant and then made his professional debut in 1978 with an innovative relief puppet playlet called *Riddles for Candy*. In his *Disc Jockey* (1980), he used the rhythm of revolving reels and creative elements in a time-space collage to pose pressing questions on a stereotype of contemporary life. In *The Project* (1981), he used austere graphic irony to stress the absurdity and sterility of technocracy and its attendant depersonalization. In *The Ballad of the Green Wood* (1983), he expressed concern over losing the beauties and benefits of nature. During this period, he did not employ artistic emotions, but rigorous artistic arguments.

The Extinct World of Gloves (1982) is unquestionably a technical tour de force. In a suggestive pictorial sequence that lasts fifteen minutes, animated gloves act out seven satirical but lovingly observed examples of various cinematic genres, ranging from the exciting rush of chase cartoons to contemporary science fiction films. This milestone film is a typical example of how Barta combines a masterful, fantastic imagination with clarity of meaning and intent.

The same is true of Barta's hour-long coproduction *Krysař* (*The Pied Piper*, 1985). The wooden puppets of the citizens of Hamelin are powerfully stylized to express cruelty, greed, and voraciousness. The scenes of the town, in both its general and detailed aspects, as well as the crowd scenes, depict a swarming Babel of endless striving, gold-digging, and feasting. All this condemns a life from which feelings and love have disappeared. It is precisely the dynamic, almost manneristically lavish emphasis on evil and greed that makes it possible to watch this film avidly, though its actors participate in a relatively simple plot, essentially devoid of dialogue. Instead, Barta used space, montage, and disproportion in a functional and dramatic manner.

Shortly afterwards, however, Barta abandoned the puppet. His black-humored cartoon *The Last Theft* (1987) is actually a live-action film with a minimum of animation but with a maximum of artistic expression. Not only are the scenery, the makeup, and the composition artistic; above all, it is the stylized hand-applied aniline coloration which bestows another dimension of irony to this horror fable about the scythe of greed striking the stone of bloodthirstiness.

The actors in Barta's latest film, *The Club of the Discarded* (1990), are old store window mannequins that are neither alive nor dead, but vegetate in an abandoned warehouse. This is a metaphor for a life that does not understand the purpose of its own existence.

Barta has received more than thirty major prizes for six out of the nine films that he has made thus far. He utilizes practically every artistic and filmmaking device to its fullest extent. He is a careful designer, but we never sense the design in his films. His strength lies in his precise artistic and directorial vision and in his thorough blending of them in the making of the films. Barta is neither nostalgic nor sentimental; he is merely contemporary and consistent. He introduced new values that have deepened the humanistic attitude of his films. In a variety of forms, he encompasses the essence of the evolutionary tendencies of contemporary animation.

Jan Švankmajer is an artist, lithographer, ceramist, scenographer, author of concrete poetry and philosophical essays, a puppeteer, filmmaker, director, animator, film editor, creator of story lines, and screenwriter. Between 1963 and 1990, he produced twenty-five films, of which one, *Something from Alice* (1987), is a full-length piece; and another, *Don Juan* (1970), a medium-length film. During the seventies and eighties, the new management of the Short Film Studio significantly restricted Švankmajer's work and forced several incompetent interventions into some of his films.

Briefly, one can say that his work contributes new dimensions of expression and content to the contemporary animated film, employing virtually all its techniques. Švankmajer seldom merely tells a story. He unveils the context, relationships, and consequences of human deeds and actions. He neither stops before the boundaries of consciousness, nor does he look merely under its threshold for causes. He draws on the connections and poesy of surrealism and deploys these in an individualistic and contemporary approach. His work also contains contemporary reflections of Dadaism and at varying times seems as compatible with Kurt Schwitters' poesy as the romantic compositions of Salvador Dali.

Švankmajer's artistry is linked to camera action, time and space, editing and montage—to the semantic function of a particular shot in a given context, in a given narrative. But thought is always the deciding factor: not 'thought' in the sense of thesis or dogma, but 'thought' as a contemplation of multiple levels of causes and effects. Švankmajer does not see good and evil as abstract illusory fictions. His art is consistently anti-illusory; his ethic is very real. Good and evil exist in each of us, both in their apparent and imperceptible forms. Švankmajer demonstrates for us the complexity of their vectors, their connections, and their naively or artfully camouflaged deformities: e.g., *Et Cetera* (1966), *The Garden* (1967), *The Flat* (1968), and *Dimensions of Dialogue* (1982).

But this interpretation would be an inappropriate oversimplification of Švankmajer's work. Good and evil are not the only issues. There are other concepts, such as beauty, stupidity, misery, freedom, cruelty, gluttony, power, dreams, fear, imagination, vice, and obsession. These are treated in his *Historia Naturae* (1967), *A Quiet Week in the House* (1969), *Don Juan* (1970), *Leonard's Diary* (1973), *The Fall of the House of Usher* (1981), *The Pit, the Pendulum, and Hope* (1983), and *Manly Games* (1988).

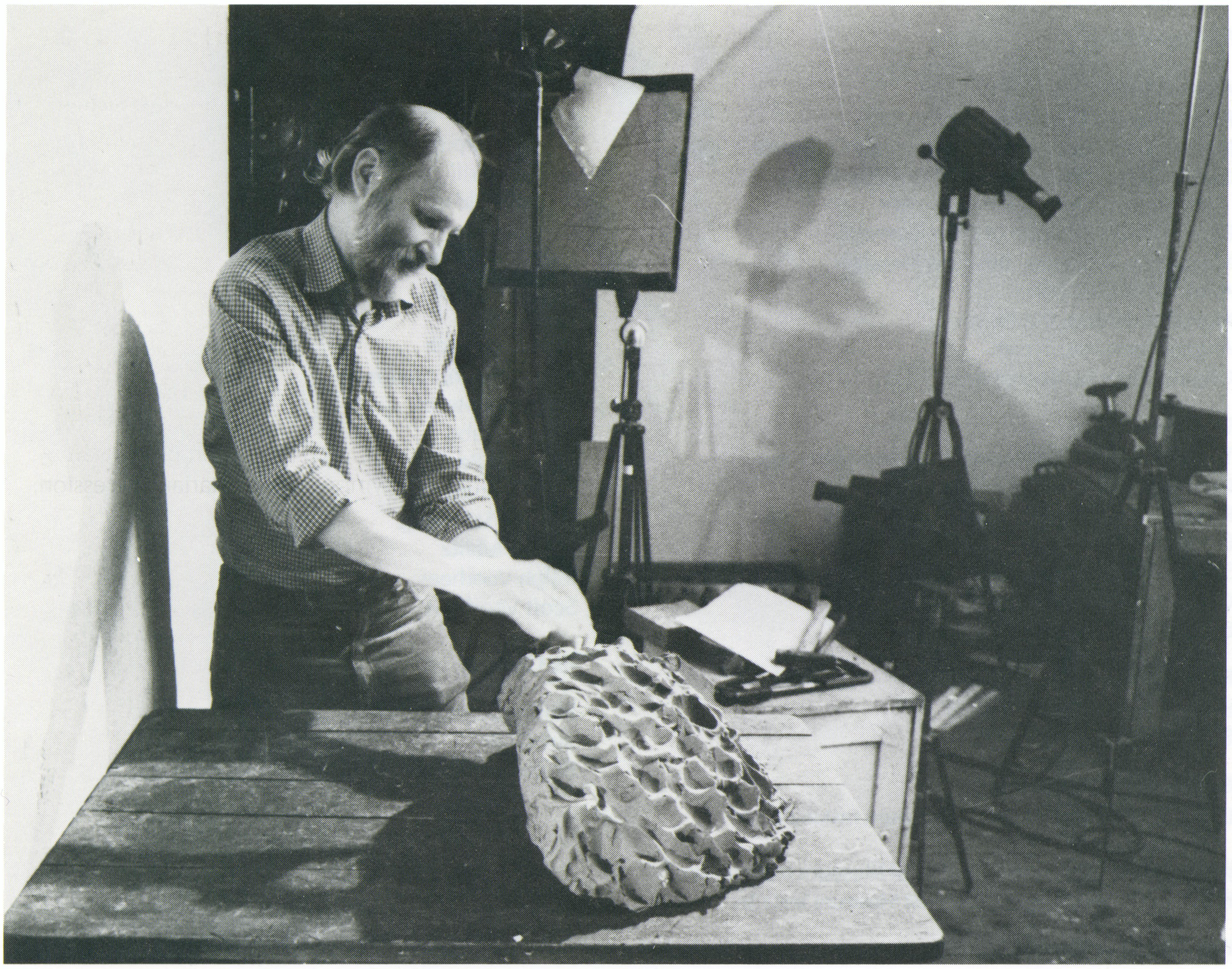
And there is also humor. Švankmajer's merciless and healthy humor will certainly be the subject of an inspired future study. Examples are seen in the films *The Castle of Otranto* (1977), and *Another Kind of Love* (1988). His films are sometimes called experiments in form. This is, of course, a fundamental misassessment. After all, we experiment when knowledge, comprehension, and logical deduction are not sufficient to lay out a course of further action—when we can only approximate the given direction in which we experiment, search, and test within a range of possible alternatives. However, discovering new materials, techniques, and processes did not appeal to Švankmajer. He always chose those methods which would best express his objectives and he worked with them quite expertly and securely. If he experimented, it was perhaps only in the exploration of those stimuli and connections in our subconscious that comprise our ego and influence our actions.

It is not important to Švankmajer if what he animates is a drawing, clay, a paper cutout, an object, a toy, a puppet-marionette, or a man dressed as a puppet; what is important are the emotions he evokes. In *Alice*, he allows us to wander for the entire ninety minutes through the many and varied landscapes of a child's dream without diminishing the thrill of our experience. In *Dimensions of Dialogue, Manly Games, Another Kind of Love*, and *Darkness, Light, Darkness* (1990), he does not merely animate clay by moulding continuous changes in facial expressions or gestures, but imperceptibly transforms these changes into a real human face and fully integrates them to remind us that the evil in us is as omnipresent as the good.

Even Švankmajer's most recent film, *The End of Stalinism in Bohemia* (another clay animation), is not merely a passionate statement on the liberating demolition of the symbols of totalitarian aggression; but also a warning against painting the old idols with new, patriotic—but nevertheless uniform—colors. Švankmajer simply is not a flatterer; he asks serious, not always pleasant, questions that get under our skin. Consequently, his very consistently anti-illusory work will—in spite of having received dozens of international awards—continue to irritate all those who feel that the role of art is one of sweet icing on a store-bought cake and who view the audience as a limited herd animal who, like themselves, misinterprets a challenge to think as snobbery and intellectual treachery.

I will conclude this cross-sectional review of the Czech animated film with a brief summary and critique. The quantity and quality of the hundreds of prizes won at international festivals prove that our animated films have fared so well for three principal reasons: their humanistic ideological value, innovative direction, and artistic mastery. To these can be confidently added the films' varied range, humor, originality, topicality, and respect for the specific characteristics of cinematic language. Czechoslovakia can perhaps also boast about the fact that it has achieved all this under the most adverse political conditions. The reasons for this are our inborn natural egalitarianism, our very typical Czech craftsmanship, stubbornness, and a passionate devotion to our chosen path or field of endeavor.

In Czechoslovakia, animated films are shown together with live-action films in theaters, they are included in short film programs, put on videocassettes, and used in the programs of film clubs; in addition to regularly scheduled children's television



Jan Švankmajer working on *Dimensions of Dialogue,* 1981.

series, they are also shown occasionally as television specials. The sale or trade of animated films by the Czechoslovak Filmexport Company is as occasional as it is unprofitable. The more successful the films are, the more incompetently they seem to be managed. Consequently, while animation could be one of our best export products, it is still dependent on government subsidies.

This year, at the 30th anniversary of the most prestigious international festival of animated films in Annecy, France, a special competition was organized of all prize-winning films to date. This competition was judged by leading international experts. Trnka's puppet animation, *The Hand*, was awarded first place; Švankmajer's *Dimensions of Dialogue* earned second place. This outstanding international success was not even mentioned in Czechoslovak press, radio, or television. And so, the Czech animated film, in spite of its artistic value and popularity with audiences, offers yet another proof of the proverb about prophets being unappreciated in their own land.

Prague, Summer 1990

Translated from the original Czech by Hana Mironoff.

Zimmerli Art Museum

Museum Staff

Administrative

Phillip Dennis Cate, Director
Jeffrey Wechsler, Assistant Director for Curatorial Affairs
Carma C. Fauntleroy, Assistant Director for Administration and Development
Dina DeFabo, Director of Development
Marguerite M. Santos, Business Manager
Anne Schneider, Editor
Marianne Ficarra, Publicist
Angela Romanek, Typist
Ulla-Britt Faiella, Receptionist

Curatorial

Trudy V. Hansen, Curator of Prints and Drawings
Laura Fattal, Curator of Education
Roberto Delgado, Preparator
Elaine Beca, Curatorial Typist
Sherrie Gauley, Curatorial Assistant
Caroline Goeser, Curatorial Assistant
Lisa Simpson, Research Assistant

Registrarial

Barbara Trelstad, Registrar
Ellen Lynch, Assistant Registrar

Exhibit Installation

Edward Schwab, Director of Museum Installation/Physical Plant
John Nasto, Assistant to Director of Museum Installation
Eleuterio Peralta, Guard/Assistant Museum Installer

Friends of the Zimmerli

Kim Nelson, Executive Director
Sue Gran, Chairperson of the Friends

Board of Overseers

Norma Bartman
Diane Burke
Dennis Carpini
Richard Drill
Lucien Goldschmidt
Lois Grayson
Carleton Holstrom
Harold Kaplan
Paul Leath
Deborah Lynch
Allan Maitlin, *Chairman*
Frederick Mezey
Kenji Otsubo
Robert S. Peckar
David Sengstack
Richard Steinberg
Mindy Tublitz
Ralph Voorhees
Scott Voorhees

Ex Officio

Phillip Dennis Cate
Sue Gran
Bruce Newman

THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY
RUTGERS